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DUNGEON

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Editorial:
Dark Sun: It Burns So Good

By Greg Bilsland

This month's magazine theme is a subject dear to my heart, as I spent most of last year running a campaign set in Athas. My first exposure to the Dark Sun® campaign setting was through the *TSR Fantasy Collector Cards*, which came out in the early 90s. At the time, I didn't understand half the statistics on the back of a card, including why a -5 Armor Class was a good thing. Still, I ravenously bought packs of these cards, enchanted by their theoretical use.

Among the packs was a smattering of Dark Sun cards. Unfamiliar with the books, I wrote them off as having weird, stylized art, scantily clad women, and outlandish monsters. I didn't learn what was so fascinating about the setting until fifteen years later.

When the 4th Edition *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* released in 2010, I decided it was time to find out why so many people loved this setting. When the setting was announced, my roommate gibbered with excitement, regaling me with descriptions of the severity of the world—how it lacked divine magic, how it was a vast and deadly wasteland, how slavery and barbarism were common, and how it was ruled over by cruel spellcasters who kept an iron grip on society. Oh, and the cannibalistic halflings.

Wait, what?

From everything my friend said, it sounded like running a Dark Sun game was just an excuse for a DM to be a jerk. Still, these elements of the setting made it compelling. Dark Sun is not defined by what it has, but by what it lacks. Eberron is an example of a setting of additions—warforged, shifters, dragonmarks, airships, the lightning rail. Athas, on the other hand, is defined by scarcity, a dearth of resources, magic, healing, freedom, and so forth. That sounded pretty interesting.

I couldn't reconcile one thing: Adventurers in 4th Edition are very durable. That didn't sound like it fit well with what I knew about the setting. I liked the addition of the rules for *arcane defiling* and weapon breakage, but something was missing:

I know, I'll take away their healing surges! That'll knock 'em down a few pegs (and frequently to negative hit points, I discovered.) I won't go into the implications of this house rule, but let's just say it worked. If you're curious, you can read more here.

Before plunging my players into Athas, I read the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* and Troy Denning's Prism Pentad series to build familiarity with the world and to get accustomed to the lexicon (*half-giant, half-giant, half-giant . . .*). I scratched around for adventure content, but I couldn't find anything that adequately met my needs, so I decided to take the approach of adapting content and events from the Prism Pentad.

Around this time, I also attended the D&D Experience convention and had the opportunity to sit in on a game session from the Ashes of Athas organized play campaign. Let me tell you, thri-kreen are dramatically more intimidating when you're in a group of five of them, and they express no reservations about devouring your player character if starvation is imminent.

With the popularity of the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* and Ashes of Athas, revisiting the setting in *Dragon* and *Dungeon* seemed like a good idea. Thinking of my own struggles trying to run Dark Sun, we wanted to offer a couple more solid adventures for Dungeon Masters looking to experience the setting. To that effect, we have "The Isle of Death," which features one of my favorite monsters, the silt horror. The other adventure, "Cruel as a Desert Wind," is classic Dark Sun, pitting characters against the villanous House Tsalaxa.

So my initial impression was proven wrong. Dark Sun is not the setting with weird art that gives the Dungeon Master free rein to be a bastard. At least, that's not the whole picture. I was delighted by the depth and versatility of the setting, and the ways in which I got to experience it—through organized play, novels, and my home game. I don't know how prolific Dark Sun will be in the next iteration of Dungeons & Dragons, but 4th Edition will always be the edition that made me a Dark Sun fan.

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The Isle of Death

A D&D® Dark Sun® adventure for characters of levels 8-10

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This Dungeons & Dragons® adventure is designed for four to six characters of levels 8–10. It is set in the Dark Sun campaign world and is a sequel to the adventure "Beneath the Dust" (*Dungeon* 187), but your group need not have played that adventure to enjoy this one.

"The Isle of Death" deals with finding a suitable place to plant a precious *seed of life* that the party has previously acquired. The adventurers travel to a remote island in the Sea of Silt to plant the seed far from the influence of the sorcerer-kings. Once on the island, they find that it is not as uninhabited as they had been led to believe.

Background

The deserts of Athas are barren, inhospitable places where life struggles to find a foothold. However, Athas has not always been so desolate. In ancient times, before the unchecked use of magic defiled the land, bountiful forests and oceans covered the world. Deep within those forests were trees of life—powerful, supernatural organisms that provided vitality to

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whole regions. Even today, a few modern trees of life can be found across Athas, sustaining small oases or sorcerer-kings' tended gardens. However, most people believe that the deep power of the trees has been lost forever to the world.

This adventure assumes that the player characters have recently acquired the seed for a tree of life. They might have received the seed during the events of "Beneath the Dust," through other adventures, or from the Veiled Alliance (or some other powerful benefactor). In any case, the seed marks an exciting and potentially world-changing discovery. However, it should also be a heavy burden for the adventurers because of its import and because it attracts evil forces bent on acquiring the seed.

The Veiled Alliance has a plan for the *seed of life*. The organization wishes for the seed to be planted far from the sorcerer-kings and defilers who would corrupt its power, somewhere it might have a chance to flourish. The Alliance knows of such a place and asks, commands, or inspires the party to take the seed there. The location is an island deep in the Sea of Silt. On a few old maps, it is called the Isle of Death. In ancient times, it was called Glintril Island. The island is between the Mountains of the Sun and the Silt Archipelago, far off the normal trade routes. It lies in an area of particularly deep silt, so only those with the ability to traverse such terrain have a chance to reach the island.

The Veiled Alliance believes there is a place on the island where raw elemental power enters the world and suggests that the adventurers plant the seed there to maximize its growth potential. An agent of the Alliance provides the characters with the means to reach the island, beginning with an ancient map, vivid dreams, or a strange mechanism that functions as a compass. The seed is starting to sprout, so time is of the essence.

The Veiled Alliance also calls in a favor and arranges for a ship to carry the adventurers to the island as quickly as possible. While the characters make the harrowing journey, the Alliance will gather additional resources to provide for the long-term protection of the tree of life, and these forces will follow the adventurers as soon as they can.

Seed of Life

The seed is a symmetrical brown pine cone with a comfortable warmth and faint energy rising from it. Recently, the cone has opened, and its scales show signs of aging, indicating that the seed needs to be planted soon. This fact adds urgency to the characters' actions in the adventure.

Because of its extraordinary power, the seed has great resilience. It has AC 10, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5, and 100 hit points. Before embarking on their journey across the Sea of Silt, the adventurers should decide who is carrying the seed or where it is kept aboard the ship.

PLANT THE SEED

Level 9 Major Quest (400 XP/character)

The adventurers complete this quest if they successfully plant the *seed of life* at the elemental conduit and defend it long enough for it to take root.

Treasure

If the characters start "The Isle of Death" at 8th or 9th level, they're likely to gain a level or most of a level during this adventure. The adventure contains only one item of monetary worth (see area 3, page 6) and one magic item (see area 4, page 6). Other treasure is for you to define. (You could choose to treat the treasure included in the adventure, which is unusual and might not be found, as extra loot.) The dray, especially Monwroth the necromancer, are the likeliest sources of treasure. The druid Vitaal and Enos's grave might be other sources of treasure, although it is best if the adventurers can gain such rewards without harming the lizard druid or the sacred site.

Links to Dregoth

The dray on the island are Dregoth's soldiers. Their equipment and treasure bears the insignia of Giustenal (DC 15 History check to identify).

Island History

In the ancient past, Glintril Island was a small tropical isle in a vast ocean. It was settled by fey drawn to the island's elemental conduit. The ocean became the Sea of Silt, and the island became a place of refuge from the genocidal wars that were raging on the mainland. Eventually, however, those tasked with eradicating the fey turned their attention to the island. Their forces swept ashore, blasting away the defenses with unbridled defiling magic, and all the island's inhabitants were hunted down and killed.

The reckless defiling magic that the attackers used was amplified by the elemental conduit, and the island became awash with necrotic energy and devoid of life for many centuries. Eventually, tiny flecks of lichen found a few footholds in sheltered crevices where rainwater collected. Infrequent visitors passed by once every few decades, bringing with them a stray plant seed or vermin that struggled to survive on the barren island. Occasional volcanic outbursts were the only other activity that the island saw for centuries.

A few hundred years ago, a druid named Enos was exploring the Sea of Silt while flying on his cloud ray companion. They were set upon by an air drake that lived in and hunted from the Mountains of the Sun, but they managed to escape and glide to Glintril Island. However, the cloud ray was mortally wounded, and Enos found himself doomed to live out the rest of his days on the isle. He was saddened by

the necrotic taint surrounding the elemental conduit but did not have the resources to destroy it.

As his life was coming to an end, Enos befriended one of the tiny lizards living on the island. He performed a ritual that poured part of his life energy into the lizard, imbuing it with sentience and the ability to communicate with other intelligent creatures. He left it instructions to continue the cycle, thus giving rise to a line of awakened lizard druids, each one carrying the name Vitaal. The cycle would continue until new vitality came to the island.

The awakened lizard druids kept vigil on the island, each one awakening his or her successor in turn. They have carefully preserved the words and teachings of Enos, turning them into their sacred oral scriptures. In particular, they have been hoping and praying for the day when a great life source would arrive in the "world" (as they call the island) and a new age of vitality might begin.

A few months ago, a dray necromancer and his escort arrived on the island. The dray came to take advantage of the island's necrotic energy, and his goal is to create an undead army for eventual use by his master. The identity of that master depends on the larger plot lines in your specific campaign. In this adventure, the default choice is Dregoth, preparing for his eventual return to the surface of Athas.

The Dusty Breeze

The Veiled Alliance takes care of the travel arrangements to Glintril Island. The adventurers must journey to the city-state of Balic and meet with Daclimitus, the human captain of the *Dusty Breeze*. The silt skimmer can glide across the Sea of Silt with the aid of a psionically powered device called an *obsidian sphere* (see below).

Captain Daclimitus supports the Veiled Alliance, but he tries to keep this affiliation secret, even from his crew. Consequently, he seems uneasy in the party's presence and doesn't ask questions about their mission. Moreover, he insists on leaving Balic as quickly as possible in case enemies of the Alliance have learned of the adventurers' quest. (They haven't, but feel free to play up the sense of urgency.)

Since the characters are clearly skilled combatants, Captain Daclimitus opts to make the journey across the Sea of Silt with minimal crew. Before the *Dusty Breeze* departs, he makes it clear that the adventurers are in charge of defending the ship if it comes under attack. Further, the captain puts them in charge of navigating to wherever they're going. The characters can navigate to the island using whatever tool(s) the Veiled Alliance provided to them.

Captain Daclimitus

Captain Daclimitus is a dwarf who speaks with a deep, raspy voice and squints a lot.

Demeanor: Daclimitus is direct, impatient, and occasionally crude. He brooks no insolence aboard his ship but is respectful of those who respect him.

Motivations: Daclimitus has been a captain in the Balician Navy for many years. The *Dusty Breeze* is considered to be a military vessel, and this trip to what he calls "the Isle of Death" is a side venture that his superiors have not approved. (They assume that he is taking the silt skimmer on regular patrol.) The dwarf is transporting the adventurers as a favor to friends in the Veiled Alliance. Nervous that the party will want him dead to keep their trip a secret, he takes pains to emphasize that he doesn't know where they're traveling once they enter the deep silt.

Aboard the Ship

The crew consists of Captain Daclimitus (the pilot), Gorath Toothpicker (male human first mate), Zaleb (male human), and Tomona (female human). All four are Silt Sea veteran companion characters who have the following statistics.

Silt Sea Veteran **Level 6 Striker**
Medium natural humanoid, human

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27; **Healing Surges** 10 — **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +10
Speed 6

Traits

Rigging Adept
The veteran can climb at full speed and does not grant combat advantage while doing so.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Carrikal** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The veteran can shift 1 square before or after the attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, or 1d8 + 8 damage if the target is granting combat advantage to the veteran.

Dejada (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Move Actions

Silt Sea Legs ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The veteran shifts up to half its speed.

Skills Athletics +10, Acrobatics +11, Nature +10

Str 14 (+5)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 10 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, carrikal, dejada, 10 stones

As the adventurers board the *Dusty Breeze*, the captain lays down the rules of travel on his ship.

Read:
"There are a few rules aboard my ship. First rule is you do whatever I say when I say it. If I say pull this rope, you pull this one and not the one next to it. Second, don't fall into the silt. If you do, you'll fall right to the bottom and die. I suggest that you wear a tether at all times while aboard. Third, once we get into the deep silt, do whatever it takes to protect the pilot and the obsidian sphere. Without the sphere or a pilot channeling its power, we sink, and then we're all dead. Welcome aboard."

Ship Features

The *Dusty Breeze* is a silt skimmer (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 124) that has been modified to fly. Its land speed of 6 has been replaced with a fly speed of 6 (hover), though its maximum altitude is only about 1 foot. The vessel can hover above any solid surface, even one as fine as the Sea of Silt. Its statistics are otherwise unchanged.

Obsidian Sphere: The *Dusty Breeze* levitates by means of a 5-foot-diameter hollow sphere of obsidian embedded in the top deck of the skimmer so that only its upper hemisphere is visible. The sphere rests in a bowl-shaped fixture and weighs 1 ton. The *obsidian sphere* is always active; its sole purpose is to lift the skimmer into the air. If the sphere is removed or destroyed (AC/Reflex 25, Fortitude 25; immune to fire, necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage; hp 175), the *Dusty Breeze* will crash.

Decks: The *Dusty Breeze* has an open upper deck and an enclosed lower deck for passengers and cargo. It also has a rear raised quarterdeck for the helm. A small area for sleeping and storage is below the quarterdeck and is accessed by a door on the upper deck. Two trapdoors and ladders connect the upper and lower decks. The total height of the skimmer's hull is 10 feet; the raised quarterdeck extends another 5 feet above that.

Mast: The skimmer has one mast that extends 50 feet above the upper deck. A DC 5 Athletics check is required to climb the rigging on the mast. A DC 15 Acrobatics check allows a creature to use a move action to slide down the length of a mast and land on its feet in a square adjacent to the mast. A failed check means that the creature falls and lands prone.

Railing: A 3-foot-high railing encloses the upper deck. Climbing carefully over the rail costs an extra square of movement. A creature can vault over the rail with a DC 12 Acrobatics check or Athletics check and ignore the extra movement cost. The rail provides a +5 bonus to saving throws to avoid going over the skimmer's side.

Pilot: The skimmer's pilot must stand at the helm atop the quarterdeck. Each round, the pilot must take a standard action to steer the ship.

Tethers: Rope tethers prevent creatures wearing harnesses from falling to their deaths. The tethers allow movement up to 10 squares from the mast. It takes a standard action to attach or detach a tether from a harness. The *Dusty Breeze*'s crew wears tethers at all times while on deck. A tether has AC 15; Fortitude/Reflex 10; immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage; vulnerable 5 fire; hp 5.

Sea of Silt

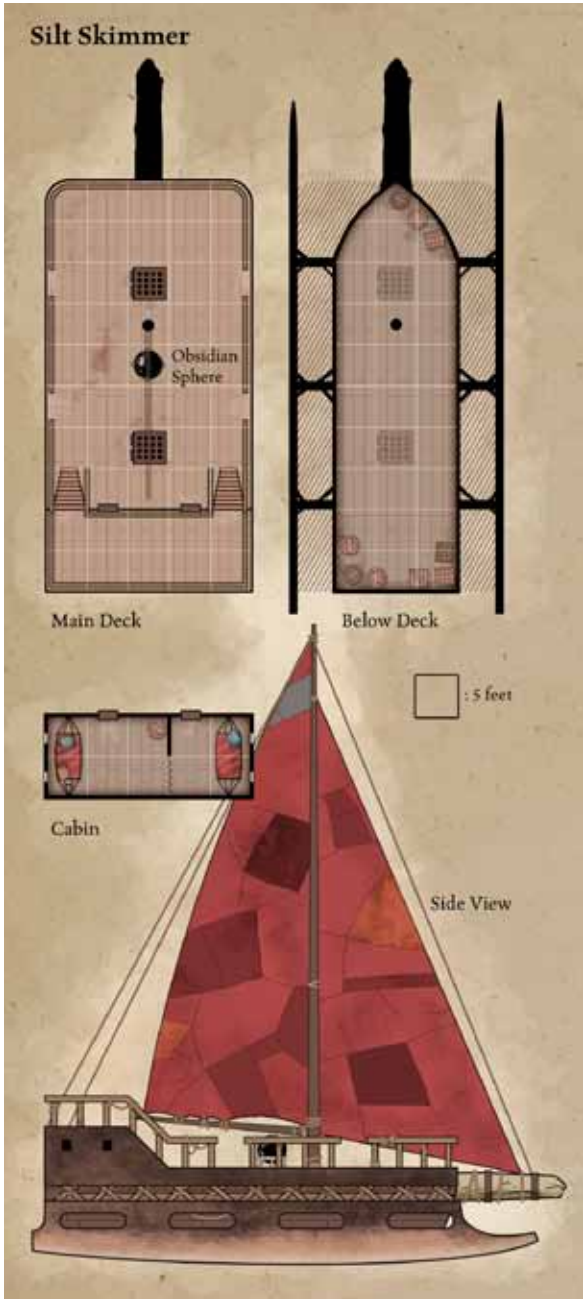
The Sea of Silt ranges in depth from a few feet near the shore to hundreds of feet in the deep trenches.

Falling: The silt doesn't protect a creature from falling damage, and normal falling rules apply (*Rules Compendium*™, page 209).

When a creature tethered to the *Dusty Breeze* falls into the silt, it swings on its tether so that it is adjacent to the ship but several squares down (specifically, 8 squares down along the long sides of the ship, 5 squares along the front of the ship, and 6 squares along the back). The creature is treated as prone until it uses a move action to regain its equilibrium.

A creature dangling by its tether can climb the tether as though climbing a rope (*Rules Compendium*, page 136).

Hazardous Silt: The silt is hindering terrain (*Rules Compendium*, page 207). At best, silt is difficult terrain. Shallow silt can have deep spots (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 137). As the silt deepens, it effectively becomes a silt-filled pit, creating a deadly falling hazard. A creature submerged in silt has no line of sight to anything, and nobody has line of sight to the submerged creature. Such a creature cannot breathe. At the end of its turn, a creature that needs



to breathe but is submerged in silt takes 5 damage from choking in the silt.

The silt is not hindering terrain for those native to the Sea of Silt, nor do they take damage from it.

Travel Time

The Sea of Silt brushes up against the city-state of Balic, where the voyage of the *Dusty Breeze* begins. The skimmer travels east, following the Estuary of the Forked Tongue until it merges with the sea proper. From there, the skimmer heads northeast into the deep sea. The journey is 300 miles and takes five days to complete at full sail.

Horror from the Deep

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

On the third day, a silt horror latches onto the ship. The adventurers must drive the beast off before it rips the ship apart.

Light: The sea is fairly calm, and visibility is good.

Silt Depth: The silt is 100 feet deep.

Monsters: 1 silt horror and two of each kind of tentacle (four tentacles attack, two hold the skimmer). More tentacles show up later in the encounter.

When the encounter starts, read:

The voyage for the past two days has been uneventful, and you are now in the deep silt far from known trade routes. A hot breeze stirs the silt on the surface, but visibility is good. Suddenly, the whole ship lurches to a halt.

The silt horror surprises the characters. It uses its surprise action to grab the *Dusty Breeze*. As the skimmer comes to a dead stop, everyone aboard must succeed on a saving throw or fall prone.

The horror then erupts from the silt to attack. Place the silt horror and four tentacles in random spaces adjacent to the ship, and roll initiative.

Silt Horror **Level 12 Solo Lurker**
Huge aberrant beast (blind) XP 3,500

HP 496; **Bloodied** 248 **Initiative** +14
AC 26, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +9
Speed 2, burrow 6 (loose earth only) Tremorsense 20
Immune blinded, gaze effects
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Regenerating Tentacles
Whenever the silt horror starts with fewer than four tentacles within 20 squares of it, more tentacles appear so that the number of tentacles within 20 squares of it equals four. These tentacles appear in unoccupied squares aboveground (even if the silt horror is underground), and the silt horror chooses what kind of tentacles appear: constricting, raking, or sweeping. The tentacles roll initiative when they appear, acting on their own turns.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.

Chomping Maw ✦ Recharge when the silt horror starts its turn completely underground
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures grabbed by a tentacle); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d12 + 8 damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Move Actions

Submerge ✦ Recharge when the silt horror starts its turn on the surface
Effect: The silt horror burrows its burrow speed to a space that is completely underground. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Triggered Actions

Fling Away ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy reduces a tentacle to 0 hit points with a melee attack.
Effect: (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering tentacle can make a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy as a free action. If the attack hits, the tentacle deals 10 extra damage and pushes the target 5 squares instead of grabbing it.

Skills Stealth +15
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+7)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Silt Horror Tentacle **Level 12 Minion Soldier**
Medium aberrant beast (blind) XP –

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +12
AC 28, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23 **Perception** +9
Speed 2, burrow 6 Tremorsense 20
Immune blinded, gaze effects, teleportation

Traits

Attached
The tentacle can be no more than 20 squares away from a silt horror.

Unhindered
When the tentacle moves, it pulls with it any creature grabbed by it. In addition, the creature remains grabbed, and the tentacle does not provoke an opportunity attack from the grabbed creature.

Standard Actions

Seize ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 10 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 20).

Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+7)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

A constricting tentacle also has the following action.

Standard Actions

Constricting Grab ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the tentacle); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 10 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the tentacle's next turn.

A raking tentacle also has the following action.

Standard Actions

Sweeping Grab ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the tentacle); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 10 damage, and the tentacle slides the target up to 3 squares to a square adjacent to the tentacle.

A sweeping tentacle also has the following action.

Standard Actions

Suffocating Grab ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the tentacle); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 13 damage, and the target falls prone.

Tactics

Silt Horror: The silt horror uses two tentacles to immobilize the *Dusty Breeze* and four tentacles to attack enemies on deck. If the tentacles holding the skimmer are destroyed, the vessel can move its speed on the pilot's turn provided that it has sufficient crew. However, Captain Daclimitus knows that a silt horror can keep up with the skimmer by burrowing under the silt, so he orders the characters to fight, and he flees only as a last resort.

When the silt horror first emerges, it uses *chomping maw* against the *Dusty Breeze* and submerges on its next turn. It then reappears on a random side of the skimmer (roll a d4):

SILT HORROR LOCATION

d4	Location
1	Fore
2	Starboard (right)
3	Aft (rear)
4	Port (left)

Whenever it resurfaces, the horror attacks either the *Dusty Breeze* or a character within easy reach. The horror sometimes lingers on the surface for 2 or 3 rounds in a row but otherwise repeats the cycle of submerging and resurfacing. When the horror uses *regenerating tentacles*, the new tentacles appear adjacent to the ship.

When bloodied, the silt horror raises its number of tentacles to eight for 1 round. (Eight tentacles become present no matter how many were present in the previous round.) If the horror's main body takes damage again, the creature retreats on its next turn.

Tentacles: An attacking tentacle tries to grab an enemy and move away, remaining within 20 squares of the silt horror. The tentacles are not strong enough to snap a tether, so creatures that are tethered to the *Dusty Breeze* cannot be yanked more than 10 squares from the skimmer's mast.

Crew Tactics: If a crew member is grabbed, the others help their comrade either by attacking the grabbing tentacle or by pulling up victims who have fallen overboard. Captain Daclimitus repeatedly spurs the adventurers, hollering "Get rid of that thing before the silt swallows us all!"

Conclusion

Captain Daclimitus is distraught about any damage to the skimmer and mutters about the Veiled Alliance owing him. Assuming that the skimmer's *obsidian sphere* remains intact, an hour's worth of improvised repairs enable the ship to continue toward its destination.

Reaching Glintril Island requires two more days of travel, but the voyage unfolds without incident.

Island Arrival

The adventurers arrive at their destination. As they search the island for the elemental conduit, they find that a dray necromancer and his escorts have arrived ahead of them. They might also find some interesting ruins and encounter Vitaal, the awakened lizard druid of Glintril Island.

As the party arrives, read:
The Isle of Death is an ugly spur of rock rising above the Sea of Silt. As the skimmer circles the island, you gauge its dimensions to be about 15 miles long and 10 miles across. A beach of black sand along the western coast turns into barren rocklands as it slopes up toward a wall of shattered mountains that hug the eastern coastline. A thin beach clings to the backs of these mountains. The northern and southern coastlines have rocky shoals awash with shallow silt. The skimmer can't navigate the shoals very easily, though it might be possible to wade through them on foot.

Captain Daclimitus owns a crude spyglass, and the adventurers can use it to scope out the island from a safe distance. Any character who peers through the spyglass and succeeds on a DC 17 Perception check sees the dray encampment on the western beach (area 1). However, the rugged terrain and shifting hazes from the Sea of Silt prevent the characters from seeing details more than 1 mile inland. Once they move ashore, they can make out general features within 1 mile of their location.

Whatever map or mechanism the adventurers used to find the island is of no help when searching for the elemental conduit. To find it, they must explore the island. By the time the party reaches the island, the *seed of life* is close to sprouting (the cone is opening wider, its scales cracking and flaking), so the exploration has some urgency.

Landing on the Island

Regardless of how the characters make landfall, Captain Daclimitus and his crew remain on the *Dusty Breeze* and do not linger near the shore. They take the skimmer just within visual range of the island and wait for an agreed-upon signal from the adventurers.

Island Terrain

Mountains: These mountains resemble the jagged, broken teeth of a giant beast. Steep cliffs are interspersed with daunting chasms, making the mountains a formidable obstacle. Before leaving a grid square of mountainous terrain, adventurers must make a group DC 17 Athletics check. Characters trained in Endurance gain a +2 bonus. If the group check fails, each character loses 2 healing surges due to minor falls, fatigue, and the stress of the heights.

Dray patrols are scarce in the mountains.

Rocky Shoals: The shoals surrounding the island are covered in silt that is shallow enough to navigate on foot. However, the shoals are riddled with hidden crevices. Before leaving a grid square of rocky shoals, adventurers must make a group DC 17 Endurance check. Characters trained in Acrobatics gain a +2 bonus. If the group check fails, each character loses 2 healing surges due to choking silt, the struggles of crossing hidden gaps, and the inevitable missteps.

Dray patrols are scarce on the shoals.

Rugged Terrain: Solidified lava layered on top of what were already rugged foothills creates numerous dead ends and small caves. The ground is uneven, treacherous, and pockmarked with fumaroles that belch clouds of hot ash. Before leaving a grid square of rugged terrain, adventurers must make a group DC 17 Nature check. Characters trained in Athletics gain a +2 bonus. If the group check fails, each character loses 1 healing surge due to collapsing lava tubes, falls, and eruptions of hot, choking ash.

Sandy Beaches: The island's black sand is tainted by defiling magic. A creature in a square of black sand (DC 12 Arcana check or Nature check to identify) regains half the normal number of hit points.

Dray regularly patrol the western beach but are scarce on the eastern beach due to the mountains between the beach and the main section of the island.

Island Encounters

Once on the island, the adventurers must begin their search for the elemental conduit where they are to plant the *seed of life*. As they explore Glintril Island, they encounter some of its other denizens.

Fixed Location Encounters

Five encounters take place in specific locations on the island. These encounters are keyed to the map on page 6.

Random Encounters

On the map of the island, each square represents 1 mile. Whenever the characters enter a grid square or take an extended rest, they might have a random encounter unless the grid square already contains a fixed location encounter.

Random encounters do not require special tactical maps. If you want to run a random encounter using miniatures, create a map. The terrain in which the encounter takes place should give you an indication of what features to add to the map, but most random encounters occur out in the open. You can add difficult or hindering terrain (such as that found in the Elementals encounter, page 10) to make the battlefield more interesting.

When a random encounter is called for, roll a d20 and consult the Random Encounters table. If you don't like the result, feel free to alter it. Then determine who, if anyone, is surprised (*Rules Compendium*, page 191). If the adventurers try to avoid detection, have them make a group Stealth check opposed by the enemies' highest passive Perception. Taking care to hide their presence (by erasing their footprints, for example) grants a +2 bonus to their check. If half or more of the characters succeed on the group Stealth check, the party goes undetected and can continue exploring the island.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Location	d20	Encounter
Mountains	01-10	No encounter
	11-12	Small avalanche
	13-14	Elementals
	15-16	Dray patrol A
	17-20	Vitaal*
Rocky shoals	01-11	No encounter
	12-13	Dray patrol A
	14-20	Elementals
Rugged terrain	01-05	No encounter
	06-08	Elementals
	09-11	Dray patrol A
	12-16	Dray patrol B
	17-20	Vitaal*
Sandy terrain	01-07	No encounter
	08-15	Dray patrol B
	16-20	Elementals

**This encounter occurs only once. After the characters meet Vitaal (see page 12), treat this result as "no encounter."*

Avalanche

Hazard Encounter Level 3 (800 XP)

As the adventurers skirt one of the mountains, an avalanche catches them by surprise.

Hazard: Small avalanche.

When the encounter starts, read:

As you weave between the jagged peaks, you hear a loud cracking noise followed by the sound of rocks tumbling down the mountainside!

The elemental energy flowing through the island has made parts of it unstable. The avalanche attacks during a surprise round, and its origin point is close enough that the resulting blast is likely to engulf the entire party. When the avalanche begins, those in the blast area of the avalanche can tell which squares will be affected by it, so they know where to flee to safety.

Small Avalanche — **Level 9 Elite Hazard**
Terrain — XP 800

Detect see Countermeasures below — **Initiative** +12
Immune attacks

Standard Actions

Attack ✦ Recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚅

Attack: Close blast 10 (creatures in the blast); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target falls prone. In addition, the area of the blast becomes difficult terrain.
Special: As soon as the attack fails to recharge, the avalanche is over and does not attack again.

Countermeasures

✦ **Detect:** Perception DC 25 (no action). *Success:* The character can take one action during the surprise round before the avalanche attacks.
✦ **Dodge:** Acrobatics DC 25 (immediate interrupt). *Success:* The character takes half damage from the attack and doesn't fall prone.
✦ **Find Cover:** Dungeoneering or Nature DC 17 (immediate interrupt). *Success:* The character gains partial cover against the attack. *Success (23 or higher):* The character gains superior cover against the attack.

Dray Patrol A

Combat Encounter Level 8 (1,800 XP)

Dray soldiers patrol with a brohg slave.

Monsters: 1 dray captain (Dythan's legion vanguard), 2 fire temple champions, 1 brohg hurler.

When the encounter starts, read:

Three dray warriors in chitin armor come into view, leading a four-armed giant.

Rocks: The area of the encounter has rocky terrain with rocks that the brohg can pick up and hurl. Some of these rocks should be difficult or blocking terrain.

Brohg Hurler — **Level 10 Artillery**
Large natural humanoid (giant) — XP 500

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 — **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 — **Perception** +12
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Slam ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the brohg grabs the target (escape DC 18).

Hurl Rock (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and falls prone.

Hurl Away (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Requirement: The brohg must have a creature grabbed.
Effect: The brohg pushes one creature grabbed by it 10 squares to a square adjacent to another creature. The pushed creature falls prone and takes 2d10 + 5 damage.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature adjacent to the pushed creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the brohg pushes the target 3 squares and knocks it prone.

Triggered Actions

Swift Reaction ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The brohg is missed by a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The brohg shifts 1 square.

Skills Athletics +15, Nature +12

Str 20 (+10)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 16 (+8)	**Int** 6 (+3)	**Cha** 6 (+3)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Giant
Equipment leather armor

Tactics: The brohg hangs back and hurls rocks while the dray rush into melee.

The dray fight to the death. However, the brohg serves the dray only out of fear. It speaks Giant, and it understands Common. The giant is willing to surrender if the dray are killed (DC 20 Bluff check or Diplomacy check, or DC 26 Intimidate check). Adventurers who offer food to the brohg gain a +2 bonus to the Diplomacy check.

Brohg Prisoner: The brohg knows that the dray arrived on the island several weeks ago and that

Dythan's Legion Vanguard	**Level 11 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn	XP 600
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55	**Initiative** +8
AC 27, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23	**Perception** +9
Speed 6	

Traits

Phalanx Formation
The vanguard gains a +1 power bonus to AC for each ally adjacent to it, up to a maximum power bonus of +4.

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC, or +18 vs. AC while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the vanguard's next turn.

Minor Actions

Shield Bash (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature marked by the vanguard); +16 vs. AC, or +18 vs. AC while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the vanguard's next turn.

Vanguard's Mark ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 5 (one enemy in the burst). The target is marked until the end of the vanguard's next turn. If the target doesn't end its next turn adjacent to the vanguard, the vanguard can immediately charge the target as a free action and doesn't provoke opportunity attacks for the charge's movement.

Dragon Breath (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +14 vs. Reflex, or +16 vs. Reflex while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: 1d6 + 6 poison damage.

Str 21 (+10)	**Dex** 12 (+6)	**Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 15 (+7)	**Int** 14 (+7)	**Cha** 15 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

little food can be found here. It also knows that the dray are on the island because a dray necromancer named Monwroth is trying to raise an undead army. Although the brohg doesn't know the necromancer's present location, it knows where to find the dray camp (fixed location 1).

2 Fire Temple Champions	**Level 8 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn	XP 350 each
HP 88; **Bloodied** 44	**Initiative** +6
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 21	**Perception** +5
Speed 5	

Traits

Wildfire Stride (fire)
Whenever the champion moves at least 3 squares from where it began its turn, its melee attacks deal 5 extra fire damage until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Fullblade (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 8 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the champion's next turn.

Minor Actions

Dragon Breath (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + 5 fire damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Fiery Assault (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the champion moves on its turn.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (the triggering enemy); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Fiery Rebuke (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the champion makes an attack that doesn't include the champion as a target.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close blast 3 (the triggering enemy in the blast); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 5 fire damage.

Str 21 (+9)	**Dex** 11 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 16 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+4)	**Cha** 18 (+8)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment plate armor, fullblade

Dray Patrol B

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,225 XP)

These patrols consist of highly disciplined squads of dray warriors.

Dythan's Legion Archer	**Level 10 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn	XP 500
HP 84; **Bloodied** 42	**Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 20	**Perception** +6
Speed 6	

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC, or +17 vs. AC while the archer is bloodied
Hit: 3d6 + 8 damage.

Longbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +17 vs. AC, or +19 vs. AC while the archer is bloodied
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage.

Arrow Volley (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. AC, or +19 vs. AC while the archer is bloodied
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage.

Minor Actions

Dragon Breath (cold) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +13 vs. Reflex, or +15 vs. Reflex while the archer is bloodied
Hit: 1d6 + 6 cold damage, and the archer can push the target 1 square.

Str 14 (+7)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 18 (+9)	**Int** 10 (+5)	**Cha** 10 (+5)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, short sword, longbow, 20 arrows

Monsters: 1 dray captain (Dythan's legion vanguard), 1 dray archer (Dythan's legion archer), 1 dray defiler, 5 dray foot soldiers (Dythan's legion warrior).

When the encounter starts, read:
Dray warriors move toward you in tight formation, their shields forming an impressive phalanx. They are mostly in light armor and armed with spears and javelins. One in bone armor has a sword, another in leather wields a longbow, and a third in robes has a staff.

The dray are ruthless and disciplined. They fight to the death to prevent interlopers from interfering in Monwroth's business. Throughout the combat, the captain constantly issues commands in the New

Dythan's Legion Vanguard **Level 11 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 600

HP 111; **Bloodied** 55 **Initiative** +8
AC 27, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23 **Perception** +9
Speed 6

Traits

Phalanx Formation
The vanguard gains a +1 power bonus to AC for each ally adjacent to it, up to a maximum power bonus of +4.

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC, or +18 vs. AC while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the vanguard's next turn.

Minor Actions

Shield Bash (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature marked by the vanguard); +16 vs. AC, or +18 vs. AC while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the vanguard's next turn.

Vanguard's Mark ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 5 (one enemy in the burst). The target is marked until the end of the vanguard's next turn. If the target doesn't end its next turn adjacent to the vanguard, the vanguard can immediately charge the target as a free action and doesn't provoke opportunity attacks for the charge's movement.

Dragon Breath (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +14 vs. Reflex, or +16 vs. Reflex while the vanguard is bloodied
Hit: 1d6 + 6 poison damage.

Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 12 (+6) **Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 14 (+7) **Cha** 15 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

Giustenal version of Draconic. The dray have trained their whole lives for this moment and have been promised eternal glory by Dregoth. If the adventurers can communicate with the dray, they can learn much of the same information that the brohg knows in Dray Patrol A (see above).

Dray Defiler **Level 10 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 500

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 **Initiative** +5
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +5
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Staff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.

Lightning Jolt (implement, lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 lightning damage.

Defiler's Breath (lightning, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 8 lightning and necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 lightning and necrotic damage (save ends). Until no creature is taking the ongoing damage, the defiler gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and a +5 power bonus to damage rolls.

Triggered Actions

Winging Wind ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy hits the defiler with an attack.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The defiler pushes the triggering enemy up to 2 squares, then flies up to 6 squares.

Skills Arcana +15
Str 10 (+5) **Dex** 10 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 20 (+10) **Cha** 13 (+6)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment robes, staff

Tactics: The dray captain and foot soldiers close to charge enemies. They stay in *phalanx formation* as much as possible, but the foot soldiers help to surround foes. They attempt to take out enemy spellcasters and healers first.

The dray defiler keeps its distance except to use *defiler's breath*.

Dythan's Legion Warrior **Level 10 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 125 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22 **Perception** +6
Speed 6

Traits

Phalanx Formation
The warrior gains a +1 power bonus to AC for each ally adjacent to it, up to a maximum power bonus of +4.

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Before and after the attack, the warrior can shift 1 square.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 8 damage, or 10 while the warrior has combat advantage against the target.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 8 damage.

Minor Actions

Dragon Breath (lightning) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 9 lightning damage.

Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 19 (+9) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+8)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, heavy shield, 4 javelins, spear

Elementals

Combat Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP)

This encounter can take place in any terrain.

Setup

The XP total for the encounter is your XP budget to combine elementals and hazards. Select monsters, hazards, and terrain based on the island section in which the encounter occurs.

Mountains: Shardstorm vortices and rocky outcroppings are most common, and silt pits occur due to windblown silt.

Silt Pit **Level 7 Hazard**
Terrain XP 300

Detect Perception DC 23 **Initiative** –
Immune attacks

Triggered Actions

Attack ✦ At-Will
Trigger: A creature enters the pit's space.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (the triggering creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage, is blinded, and is restrained (see Countermeasures). Until the target exits the pit, other creatures have no line of sight to the target.
Miss: The target returns to the last space it occupied, and its movement ends immediately.

Countermeasures

✦ **Escape:** Acrobatics or Athletics DC 16 (move action). *Success:* The target is no longer restrained.
✦ **Exit:** Athletics DC 16 (move action). *Success:* The target climbs out of the pit, ceases taking the ongoing damage from the hazard, and is blinded (save ends).
✦ **Exit Assistance:** Acrobatics or Athletics DC 16 (standard action). *Requirement:* The assistant must have a tool that can reach the target, such as a pole or rope. *Success:* The target gains a +5 bonus to any check to escape or exit the hazard.

Rocky Shoals: These areas are like mountains, except here silt wisps and pits are more common.

Rugged: Silt is uncommon in this terrain, but any combination of elementals and hazards is possible.

Sandy: Rocky outcroppings and necrotic pools are sparse, but black sand is ubiquitous. Death shards prefer necrotic pools, so they are uncommon.

Terrain

Choose among the following terrain types for designing your encounter area. Hazardous terrain can be identified with a DC 12 Arcana check or Nature check.

Black Sand: A creature in a square of black sand regains half the normal number of hit points.

Death Shard **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium elemental magical beast XP 350

HP 71; **Bloodied** 35 **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 **Perception** +7
Speed 3, fly 3 (hover) Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic

Standard Actions

Razor Shard ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage.

Death Bolt (necrotic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Critical Fracture (necrotic) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy scores a critical hit against the shard.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of its next turn.

Life to Death ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The shard resists damage.
Effect (No Action): The shard's attacks deal 1d8 extra damage until the end of its next turn.

Variable Resistance ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The shard takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): The shard gains resist 5 to the triggering damage type until the end of the encounter.

Skills Stealth + 14
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 7 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+6)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal

Necrotic Pools: These shallow, hissing pools of necrotic filth are difficult terrain. A pool can be as small as 1 square or as large as a 1d4-square area. Any creature that ends its turn in a necrotic pool takes 5 necrotic damage.

Rocky Outcroppings: A rocky outcropping usually fills 1d4 squares and is blocking terrain 1d4 × 5 feet high (DC 15 Athletics to climb).

Shardstorm Vortex **Level 7 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental magical beast (air, earth) XP 300

HP 80; **Bloodied** 40 **Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19 **Perception** +6
Speed 0, fly 8 (hover)
Immune disease, poison

Traits

Sandblast ✦ Aura 1
Each enemy in the aura takes a -2 penalty to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Abrasive Slam ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 2 damage.

Whirling Blast ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: The vortex shifts up to 4 squares and makes an attack.
Attack: Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 3 damage, and the vortex pushes the target 1 square.
Miss: Half damage.

Str 10 (+3) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 5 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Silt Pits: Hidden under the silt are pits (1d6 × 5 feet deep) that occupy 1d4 squares and have rocky sides (DC 15 Athletics to climb). See "Hazardous Silt" (page 4) for the effects, or use the silt pit trap.

Monsters

Choose among the following elementals: Death Shard, Shardstorm Vortex, Silt Wisp.

Tactics: Death shards prefer to float above hazardous terrain, especially necrotic pools, to keep melee attackers at bay. If the terrain doesn't deter enemies, the shard tries to float just out of melee range as soon as it can do so without risking opportunity attacks.

Shardstorm vortices can fly, but they tend to stay close to the ground. These elementals like to attack separate targets rather than concentrate their attacks on one enemy at a time.

Silt Wisp	Level 10 Minion Lurker
Small elemental magical beast (air, earth)	XP 125
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +14
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 20	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, burrow 6	Blindsight 3
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
☼ **Blinding Silt** ✦ **Aura** 1	
The aura is lightly obscured to enemies. Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.	
Ghostly	
Any enemy that makes an area or close attack against the wisp must make the attack roll twice and take the lower result.	
Silt Walk	
The wisp ignores difficult terrain resulting from dirt, sand, or silt and leaves no tracks in such terrain. The wisp can move across and stand on nonsolid horizontal surfaces (such as silt or water) as if they were solid ground.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Choking Silt** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 5 damage.	
Str 4 (+2)	**Dex** 20 (+10)	**Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 10 (+5)	**Int** 4 (+2)	**Cha** 6 (+3)
Alignment unaligned	**Languages** –	

Like the vortices, silt wisps prefer to attack multiple targets. Silt wisps might attack in waves instead of all at once.

These elementals do not pursue enemies that flee.

Vitaal

Roleplaying Encounter

The adventurers meet Vitaal, an awakened druid lizard that could be a valuable ally.

When the encounter starts, read:

A 2-foot-long red lizard pops out of a nearby crevice. It is wearing intricately engraved leather armor. Several other smaller lizards cluster about. The lizard stands up on its hind legs, points a small staff at you, and says: "Stop where you are! Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Vitaal is intensely curious about the adventurers but also skeptical. If the party attacks the lizard druid, he and his reptilian followers vanish into crevices too small for the characters to enter. Use the following roleplaying notes to guide this encounter.

Roleplaying Vitaal

Vitaal carries himself with great dignity despite his tiny size. His word choices and phrasing are archaic and elaborate. He quotes the holy sayings of Enos the Awakener, and he always adds "Blessed be his name" after mentioning Enos by name. His earnestness and his limited worldview (the island is his whole world) can be comical, but his deep conviction lends him an air of heroism.

Vitaal is a true believer in Enos's prophecy that a new source of life will arrive on the island someday. Nonetheless, he is skeptical that the Promised Day has arrived. If the adventurers mention or reveal the *seed of life* to Vitaal, a smaller lizard whispers, "Patriarch, they are the bearers of the seed! The Promised Day is upon us!" The young lizard can hardly contain its excitement, but Vitaal shushes it while he ascertains the party's full intentions.

Questions and Answers

Below are some common questions and answers that might come up during discussions with Vitaal. Read or paraphrase them to maintain a conversation.

Who are you?

"I am Vitaal, 97th son of Enos the Awakener, blessed be his name."

Who is Enos?

"Enos, blessed be his name, granted understanding to my first ancestor so that we might carry on his duty. The winds of the sea seemed ill-fated the day that Enos, blessed be his name, crashed here on the world from his home beyond the sea. But the winds blow in all directions, and because of that crash, Vitaal the First met the prophet. Since then, ninety-seven generations of my people have stood ready."

What's your purpose on this island?

"I lead my people while we wait for the Promised Day, when life again is brought to the world and the darkness is ended. From the sandy shore to the mighty mountains, all the world will become full of fruit and light on that day."

Will you help us?

"How can we know that you are not deceivers sent by the death-dealer?"

Where is the elemental conduit?

"I shall say no more until I know whether you are bearers of good or ill."

What do you know about the dray on the island?

"The invaders arrived a few weeks ago. They are loud and easy to avoid, but the death-dealer who leads them uses the island's dark power to animate the bones of the ancients."

Successful Negotiation

If the adventurers convince Vitaal to assist, read:

"I never thought this day would come during my time, but I am convinced that you are destined to fulfill the prophecy of Enos the Awakener, blessed be his name. The Promised Day has arrived! How shall we proceed?"

Vitaal can share the following information:
"In order to end the corruption and rid the world of darkness, you must plant the seed of life in the island's broken heart. According to the sacred sayings, spoken from the mouth of Enos the Awakener (blessed be his name), the seed will take root in the darkness and destroy its malignancy. A new age will come to all the world. However, the death-dealer will not let this happen. Even with you here, we cannot hope to defeat him and his abominations in a direct attack. The sacred sayings tell us that if a seed is planted, it will break death's curse on this place. We will need to protect the seed while it takes root. Then the dead that walk will walk no more. The seed is strong and ready. A few moments, a minute at most, and victory will be ours."

In plain language, Vitaal suggests that if the party plants the *seed of life* in the elemental conduit and defends it for a few rounds, it should be able to break the necrotic taint, and the undead defending the area will fall inert. Vitaal suggests that he and his "people" create a distraction while the adventurers plant and protect the seed. He can also tell the adventurers how to find the elemental conduit and suggests that they first visit the grave of Enos the Awakener (area 2) to receive his blessing, if they haven't already done so.

Once the conversation ends, Vitaal leaves to make preparations and gather his people. This gives the adventurers a chance to continue exploring the island (if they wish) before heading to the elemental conduit. Vitaal says he will meet them near the conduit at an agreed-upon time.

Failed Negotiation

If the adventurers come across as selfish or cruel, Vitaal is convinced that they are not the ones destined to end the island's necrotic curse, and he might believe they have ill intent. He and his people neither aid nor directly oppose the characters. Instead, they watch events unfold from their myriad hiding places among the rocks.

Fixed Locations

The following encounters occur in specific locations on the island and are keyed to the map on page 6.

1. Dray Encampment

Exploration/Combat Encounter

The dray have set up their main encampment on the western shore of this black sand beach. The player characters might have seen the encampment while surveying the island from the *Dusty Breeze*.

Read:
A large encampment is tucked among the black sand dunes that line the shore. Dozens of humanoids move among tents laid out in a careful pattern. A large flag with a dragon insignia flaps above them. Four black ships with sinister draconic figureheads are pulled up on shore nearby, their masts piercing the green sky like black needles.

The flag bears Dregoth's insignia, recognizable with a DC 24 History check. The longships are psionically powered vessels but have designs unlike any the adventurers have seen before. The ships have total carrying capacities far in excess of the number of dray so they can transport all of Monwroth's undead abominations back to the mainland.

There are about two hundred dray and twenty brohgs on the island, which means that about ten type A patrols (page 8) and fourteen type B patrols (page 9) are available. About half of these patrols are at the encampment at any given time.

If the adventurers linger or try to approach the camp, they encounter a dray patrol. After that, if they still insist on trying to get closer to the camp, they are likely to be attacked by two or more patrols at the same time.

2. Enos's Grave

Exploration Encounter

Enos the Awakener's grave is here, carefully tended by Vitaal and his followers. The adventurer who carries the *seed of life* might find a boon here.

Read:
This small valley contains a startling amount of life. The lichen covering the rocks is brightly colored, and most of the valley is filled with grasses, though they are small and scrubby. A small stone stands in the center of the valley.

If the characters approach the gravestone, read:
The stone bears an inscription in Common that reads, "Enos the Awakener. Father of us all. Blessed be his name." Without warning, a gentle rain falls on you.

The rain shower is a blessing and lasts only a few seconds. A DC 17 Arcana check or Religion check reveals that the adventurer carrying the *seed of life* is now invisible to undead. This effect lasts for one week, until the character plants the seed, or until the character uses an attack power to hit or miss an undead creature.

3. Ancient Battlefield

Exploration Encounter

This area is an ancient battlefield in which the adventurers can find a set of armor and a few clues about the island's history.

Read:
Something glints in the sun—a metal object!

The object is a metal breastplate left behind from an ancient battle. A few other fragments from a suit of plate armor are buried nearby.

Treasure: The partial suit of plate armor was once magical but has suffered from long centuries buried in the sand and is not useful as armor. Nonetheless, the steel is worth 500 gp on the open market either as raw material or as a collector's item.

The breastplate has a double circle emblem on it. A DC 30 History check reveals that this was an emblem used by Wyan of Bodach, a sorcerer-king who died ages ago.

One of the armor parts has a small clay tablet attached to it. The tablet is covered in ancient hieroglyphics that the adventurers cannot read. The tablet also shows a map of the island along with various arrows depicting what looks like a battle plan. Marked on the map is a village at what is now the ancient shrine (area 4). Comprehend Languages or a similar ritual can translate the hieroglyphics:

Once we arrive at Glintril Island, you will take your men and secure the western beach. You should be prepared for and deal with any eladrin defenders.

– General Hyghmar, Second Legion of Bodach

4. Ancient Shrine

Trap Encounter Level 9 (400 XP)

The adventurers stumble across an ancient shrine from when the island was a refuge for fey creatures. Occasional flashes of lightning from the trap are visible up to one mile away.

Trap: Storm ward.

When the characters arrive here, read:

Ruins stick up out of the volcanic rock. They look like they were recently revealed when the rock shelf covering them broke away. Only the shell of one building remains, but you can see a few etchings on the walls. A 5-foot-deep alcove in the middle of one mostly intact wall contains a 5-foot-long staff partially wrapped in gold cloth. An armored dray lies dead before the alcove.

A DC 12 Perception check shows numerous dray footprints in the ash around the shrine but very few near the alcove. A DC 17 Arcana check or Heal check reveals that the dray was killed by a lightning bolt.

The wall etchings are badly eroded. They depict humanoids in martial poses and in wooded settings.

Treasure: The staff and gold cloth are a furled *standard of Taraskir.*

Trap: A magical trap treats the standard and the cloth as a single warded object.

Storm Ward	**Level 9 Trap**
Object	XP 400
Detect Arcana DC 25	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Attack (lightning, teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: A creature removes the warded object from its starting location.	
Attack (Opportunity Action): Ranged 10 (the triggering creature) ; +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 lightning damage.	
Effect: The warded object teleports back to its starting location.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
✦ **Disable:** Arcana or Thievery DC 25. *Three Successes:* The trap is disabled. *Failure (20 or lower):* The character triggers the trap.	

When the party obtains the standard, read:

The battle standard's staff is made of dark, weathered wood. Golden cloth with a metallic sheen makes up the flag, which has a stylized red lion's head on it.

A DC 25 History check reveals that the standard likely belonged to followers of Taraskir, an ancient giant who once ruled Giustenal and was renowned for his wisdom and bravery. After his death at the hands of the sorcerer-king Dregoth, Taraskir became a cult figure. Rumor has it that some people still worship the hero giant.

Standard of Taraskir	Level 13 Uncommon
The banner unfurls with a roar to reveal a stylized lion's head in red against a gold background.	
Wondrous Item	17,000 gp
Utility Power (zone) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)	
Effect: When you plant the standard in your space or an adjacent square, it creates a zone in a close burst 10. While in the zone, you and your allies gain a +3 item bonus to damage rolls, and can use second wind as a minor action. This effect lasts until the end of the encounter or until the standard is removed from the ground. Any character in or adjacent to the battle standard's square can remove it from the ground as a standard action.	

5. Elemental Conduit

Combat Encounter Level 14 (5,600 XP)

By the time the characters reach the elemental conduit, they must plant the seed quickly and defend it while it takes root. The conduit is a convergence of elemental power that the *seed of life* can tap into to accelerate its growth and power.

Monsters: 1 dray necromancer (D), 2 cinder zombies (Z), 8 skeleton mobs (S; 3 or 6 initially on the map).

When the adventurers arrive, read:

You reach the entrance of a small canyon with an exit at the far end. Its sides are 50-foot-high cliffs. The canyon teems with skeletons. Some are shambling piles of bones, some are humanoid, and some are lumbering monstrosities combining bones from many different creatures.

Sludge pools are scattered across the canyon, including a large one with a small island in the middle. Manifestations of air, earth, fire, and water erupt from this island at ground level, forming an elemental vortex.

Not far from the vortex are ruins and a pulpit made of bones, upon which stands a tall, thin dray dressed in black robes and wielding a staff. The dray is casting a ritual. As

he chants, more undead erupt from the ground, including a pair of charred zombies with cinders swirling about them. Monwroth and his undead are too preoccupied with the ritual to notice the adventurers. When the characters move into the canyon, roll initiative, and the adventurers gain a surprise round.

Any hazardous terrain can be identified with a successful DC 12 Arcana check or Nature check.

Conduit Fissures: The map shows fissures in the ground around the necrotic pool, above which swirls the elemental conduit (see below). These fissures take up 3 squares each, and any creature that ends its turn in a fissure's area takes 5 acid, cold, fire, and thunder damage. Where the fissures meet the necrotic pool, the elemental damage dealt is in addition to the pool's necrotic damage (see below).

Elemental Conduit: The ruptured conduit spews forth a vortex of air, earth, fire, and water 30 feet tall, 5 feet wide at the base, and 15 feet across at the top. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the vortex takes 10 acid, cold, fire, and thunder damage and is pushed 5 squares from the center of the vortex. A creature can take the damage once per turn. A character can plant the *seed of life* beneath the vortex without coming into contact with it.

Necrotic Pools: These shallow pools of necrotic filth are difficult terrain. Any creature that ends its turn in a necrotic pool takes 5 necrotic damage.

Once the *seed of life* is planted, the necrotic pools solidify and begin to crack. From that point on, the necrotic pools become normal terrain.

Ruined Walls: These tumbled ruins are adorned with eroded fey motifs. They are blocking terrain about 5 feet high. A character can scramble over a ruined wall by taking a move action, or treat the wall as difficult terrain with a successful DC 16 Athletics check or Acrobatics check.

Tactics: Monwroth directs one of the cinder zombies to attack. It fights with mindless ferocity, striking at the nearest target. Monwroth keeps the other cinder zombie at his side until the first one dies or he comes under direct attack.

Monwroth uses *life drain* as often as possible but otherwise uses *ray of enfeeblement*. He uses *poison field* if he can catch three or more enemies in the burst.

The skeleton mobs swarm the nearest adventurers or try to uproot and destroy the *seed of life*.

Vitaal

If Vitaal is with the party, he leaves to create a distraction on the far side of the canyon.

If the party waits for Vitaal's distraction, read:
A blinding flash of light on the far side of the canyon breaks the dray necromancer's concentration. He sends half the skeletons to investigate while the rest of the skeletons and two cinder zombies remain.

Vitaal's distraction leaves only three skeleton mobs on the battlefield at the start of the encounter.

Planting the Seed

The adventurer with the *seed of life* must plant it directly below the elemental vortex, on the small island surrounded by the necrotic pool. Planting the seed is a standard action.

When the seed of life is planted, read:
You bury the seed below the elemental vortex. A moment later, the entire canyon trembles. The necrotic pool solidifies and begins to crack. Suddenly, two more skeleton mobs erupt from the earth and shamble toward the seed.

Two more skeleton mobs arise within 5 squares of the elemental conduit. Each mob rolls initiative when it arises, and it focuses on destroying the *seed of life* before the seed takes root.

Dragonborn Necromancer (D) **Level 14 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 1,000

HP 108; **Bloodied** 54 **Initiative** +8
AC 28, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +7
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Rotting Staff** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 1 damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends).

⊛ **Ray of Enfeeblement** (implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 13 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is also weakened (save ends both).

Life Drain (implement, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** if the necromancer misses with the attack
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 11 necrotic damage, and the necromancer gains 10 temporary hit points.

Poison Field (implement, poison, zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +19 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 13 poison damage.
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the necromancer's next turn. Any creature that starts its turn in the zone takes 10 poison damage.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists.

Minor Actions

Dragon Breath (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +17 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target cannot regain hit points (save ends).

Skills Arcana +18
Str 12 (+8) **Dex** 13 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+7)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 22 (+13) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment robes, staff

Monwroth

Dregoth ordered Monwroth to go to the island and raise an undead army. This task has proved more difficult than anticipated since the necrotic link animating the undead is tenuous. Nonetheless, the necromancer had been making progress and was thinking about sending the first batch of undead to the dray ships (area 1) to be loaded. He is angry about the interruption.

2 Cinder Zombies (Z) **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 700 each

HP 121; **Bloodied** 60 **Initiative** +9
AC 28, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 fire, 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

☼ **Burning Embers** (fire) ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that leaves the aura takes 10 fire damage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Fist of Cinders** (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage plus 2d6 fire damage.

Triggered Actions

Punishing Sparks (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within the zombie's aura makes an attack that does not include the zombie as a target.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 fire damage.

Choking Cloud (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The zombie is first bloodied.
Attack (Free Action): Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d12 + 7 poison damage, and the target cannot spend healing surges (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target cannot spend healing surges until the end of the zombie's next turn.

Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 12 (+7) **Wis** 10 (+6)
Con 17 (+9) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 6 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

The Seed Takes Root

Once the *seed of life* is planted, it begins absorbing the energy from the elemental conduit. Five rounds later, it takes root.

8 Skeleton Mobs (S) **Level 9 Soldier**
Large natural animate (swarm, undead) XP 400 each

HP 93; **Bloodied** 46 **Initiative** +11
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant, 5 to close and area attacks

Traits

☼ **Grasping Claws** ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura is grabbed by the mob (escape DC 17). Until the grab ends, the enemy grants combat advantage.

Swarm
A swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 13 (+5) **Int** 3 (+0) **Cha** 3 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

When the seed takes root, read:

Suddenly, an unearthly whoosh fills the canyon as the elemental vortex explodes outward and dissipates, showering the area in pebble-sized rocks and water. Fire burns away the necrotic filth and is quickly doused by a cool rush of air. The last of the undead monstrosities tremble and collapse into lifeless heaps.

Silence fills the canyon as you notice a tiny pale green shoot rising out of the small mound in which the seed was planted. The elemental conduit has been sealed, giving rise to new life.

Any undead in the canyon are destroyed when the *seed of life* takes root. Living creatures can spend a healing surge. If Monwroth is still alive, the energy of

his ritual backfires through him, annihilating him in a gout of green fire.

If Vitaal aided the adventurers, they can find his corpse and those of his people buried under piles of bones. The level of violence evident on their small bodies bears testament to their fierce determination to aid in the culmination of Enos's prophecy. Vitaal's expression in death looks strangely serene.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the adventurers recover from the final battle, they need to decide what to do while they wait for the Veiled Alliance reinforcements to arrive. The characters must eventually make their way back to the coast and signal the crew of the *Dusty Breeze* that they're ready to depart.

The dray at the encampment (area 1) don't immediately realize that anything has gone wrong because they were under orders to not disturb Monwroth. If the dray realize that the necromancer is gone, their remaining leaders pack up and leave so they can report that something has destroyed the undead army. Once the dray are gone, the adventurers can take their time in exploring the island.

The *seed of life* takes root quickly, and within days, flowers spring across the canyon floor, vines snake across the slopes, and a tree of life has begun to grow. Transformation of the island from a desolate wasteland to a thriving ecosystem will take a long time. When members of the Veiled Alliance arrive, they take over caretaking duties, leaving the adventurers free to move on.

What happens next depends on the characters' choices and how you want your campaign to evolve. In any case, the adventurers can take comfort in the knowledge that they struck a blow for life and hope.

About the Author

Jared Espley is the author of "Beneath the Dust" (*Dungeon* 187), which is also set on the barren world of Athas. He works for NASA, studying the barren world of Mars, but he nonetheless enjoys trees and rivers. Jared thanks his friends for their help in playtesting this adventure.

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The True

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"Freedom? You are all fools! Your freedom will be taken from you, for I have seen the portents. They will come from below, they will bind the elements, they will pierce the defenses, and they will bring him back. Mighty King Kalak shall be reborn, and you will all bow before him once more!"

–Zalath the Insane, beggar

Many in the harsh desert world of Athas look with envy to Tyr as a place fortunate enough to have found freedom. They fail to realize that Tyr's freedom has been costly, leaving the city on the brink of chaos. The death of King Kalak at the hands of the Veiled Alliance left his templars without magic and created a power vacuum. Multiple factions including King Tithian, merchants, nobles, templars, and former slaves struggle to control the city and set its course.

These groups are not alone. A secret organization known as the True believes that Tyr must return to its former ways. They seek nothing less than to restore Kalak or another sorcerer-king to the throne.

History of the True

The weeks following Kalak's death were extremely difficult for the crafters, merchants, and nobility who had once prospered through slavery and the old balance of power. In the brickyards of the Smiths' District (ironically, under the shadow of the ziggurat where Kalak was struck down), a handful of business owners found common cause when discussing their grievances. They began to meet in secret and explore the means by which they could return Tyr to its former ways.

Initially, the organization was unsuccessful, doing little more than complaining and lobbying templars and freemen without gain. This situation changed when the group recruited a templar and an influential noble.

Quaan

Quaan is a mid-level templar who oversees the brickyards. Previously working for the good of a free Tyr, he began to sour after attempts on his life by former slaves who resented his station. Quaan knew that Tyrians would respect him if he could wield the magic he once gained from Kalak, so he joined the secret organization, which did not yet have a name.

Quaan also brought knowledge that stunned the group, for he had overheard senior templars discussing a secret regarding the fall of Kalak. The Veiled Alliance assassins never recovered the sorcerer-king's body. After being wounded by the gladiator Rikus, Kalak retreated into his ziggurat to weave powerful magic, so he might have lived on in some manner. Perhaps the artifacts in the ziggurat hold the key to awakening him or binding his power to another.

With this knowledge, the group found its purpose. Quaan proposed that they call themselves "the True" to reflect their loyalty to the cause of restoring Kalak and the Tyr he had created.

Murter Dyan

Because metal is the rarest commodity on Athas, every sorcerer-king and merchant house in the Tablelands covets Tyr's iron mine. Although the mine is

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overseen by Borger, the minister of mines for King Tithian, a few noble families own partial interests in it as well.

The Dyans are one such family, and Murter Dyan is their cruel patriarch. The noble slew his older brothers and poisoned his father, all for power. Seeing his wealth and position threatened by Tyrian freedom and by a weak King Tithian, he sought those who could help him regain the old balance of power by any means necessary. Murter has become the de facto leader of the True, funding its growth and encouraging its ruthless methods.

Quaan's revelations offered Murter a tremendous opportunity. If he were the one to return Kalak to life, surely the sorcerer-king would reward him with great power. Although Murter keeps it a secret from the other members of the True, resurrecting Kalak is merely his backup plan. The ambitious noble knows that if he could make himself a sorcerer-king, his power would be unimaginable.

Campaign Sketchbook

Location: The brickyards of the Smiths' District continue to be important to the True. Several members work here by day as supervisors and equipment suppliers, keeping their ears open for disgruntled merchants, templars, or guards who might be recruited. The True also monitors the workers, identifying those who might become leaders in the cause of freedom and arranging work "accidents" for them.

Plot: The adventurers are approached by Nori, a mul ex-slave who often represents the free slave faction. She suspects foul play in the death of a well-regarded brickyard supervisor and asks the party to investigate the event discreetly. Careful questioning reveals that disappearances are common, but asking too many questions results in an ambush by the True.

Plot: Quaan thirsts for the power he once had, but he disagrees with Murter's methods. His crisis of conscience increases as the True's bloodshed escalates. Adventurers who are investigating the brickyards will frequently meet Quaan, who convincingly plays the role of an overworked, oblivious bureaucrat. Altruistic characters might convince him to turn against the True; self-serving characters could instead solidify his dedication to the organization.

Plot: Murter Dyan isn't satisfied with his family's interests in Tyr's iron mine and wants more power. He has been grooming a talented templar psionicist, Azzer Lirin, to assassinate Minister Borger. Azzer has joined the True, but he doesn't trust Murter entirely. The psionicist senses that the noble might try to eliminate him after the deed is done. To ingratiate himself with Murter, Azzer decides to go through with the assassination but then frames the adventurers for the crime so as to remain in Murter's good graces. Whether this scheme works as Azzer intended it to is up to the DM.

ASHES OF ATHAS

Ashes of Athas is a story-rich organized play campaign run by Baldman Games for Wizards of the Coast. Chapters of three linked adventures premiere at the D&D® XP, Origins, and Gen Con conventions before being released on a limited basis for home play. Chapters 1 through 3 of the campaign featured Veiled Alliance adventurers who attempt to thwart the True. Many of the plot suggestions in this article are based on the campaign, though efforts have been made to avoid spoilers. Fans should stay tuned for more from the True in upcoming chapters of the Ashes of Athas campaign!

Organization and Goals

The True must operate in complete secrecy. Many factions oppose the group or seek its demise, including nobles such as Agis of Asticles, the other deposers of Kalak, the freed slaves, the Veiled Alliance, and templar competitors. Thus, the True uses a cell structure similar to that of the Veiled Alliance. Members employ pass phrases and signs to communicate without being identified by others. Each also carries an emblem hidden on his or her person—a ceramic disc with an image of Kalak on one side and a draconic humanoid on the other.

Each cell has specific objectives based on its strengths. Some engage in political negotiations, pressuring nobles and other members of the council. Others spy on merchants, working to prevent the merchant houses from gaining too much power. Those with arcane capabilities research the ziggurat as well as the Gray.

Goals

The True has set the following goals for itself.

- Prepare Tyr for a return to its former ways by destabilizing the free city and the new council.
- Weaken or defeat the Veiled Alliance, and steal the knowledge of what that group saw in the ziggurat.
- Bring back slavery and the power of templars.
- Reinstate Kalak or another sorcerer-king.
- Combine ancient elemental power with other power sources to restore Kalak or create a replacement (see "Recent Developments").

Campaign Sketchbook

People: The True includes business owners, craftworkers, and their underlings, all of whom have a proclivity for violence. Several are accomplished psionicists or defiling arcanists.

Location/Plot: The Artisan District has become a workplace for many freed slaves. The dwarf Lumbros, an obsidian weapon crafter and a member of the True, plans a series of intrigues to destabilize Tyr. Jossi the Juggler (*Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, page 137) has noticed his efforts, though she does not know his motives. The adventurers can rescue Jossi when the True ambushes her for prying too deeply. She knows that Lumbros's allies are delving into Under-Tyr and recommends that the heroes visit the store Athas Revealed to procure a map if they want to help her. If the characters ever get in over their heads, Jossi's network of thieves could come to the rescue.

Plot: Veiled Alliance members were the last to see Kalak and the interior of his ziggurat, and they sealed it with powerful wards. The True initiates raids on key Alliance safe houses to steal the alliance's knowledge. The Veiled Alliance turns to the adventurers for help recovering the scrolls and tomes from the True. Divinations suggest that some of these items were taken into Under-Tyr and others to Altaruk.

Plot: The village of Altaruk is an important merchant outpost. The True has also learned that it is controlled by the Veiled Alliance. A True cell is preparing to assassinate Altaruk's leader, control its trade, and investigate an ancient elemental temple in the hills nearby. (The Free RPG Day 2010 adventure *Bloodsand Arena* is useful for this plot arc.)

Merchant Factions: Since slaves are the primary commodity of House Ianto, its members could become allies of the True. House Stel of Urik might help to destabilize Tyr in preparation for war. House Wavir opposes slavery and could provide the adventurers with support against the True, especially in defense of Altaruk.

Plot: As the characters unravel the True's hierarchy, they hear the name of Shoshana Beryl (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 135). Manipulated by Murter Dyan into acting as a front for him and pressing for a powerful noble senate, Shoshana is unaware of the True. Agis of Asticles is concerned about her and might aid the characters' investigations.

Recent Developments

Claiming to have been sent by the elements themselves, a mul named Obadias recently approached the True. He brings strange knowledge of how primordial elements can be combined with psionic or arcane energy within the ziggurat to raise Kalak.

Murter Dyan's support for Obadias outweighs Quaan's skepticism. The True now delves into ancient elemental mysteries from a base of operations hidden in the area of Under-Tyr known as the Belly of the Noble. Obadias is obsessed with locating portals to the Gray, as well as discovering a means of entering the ziggurat.

Campaign Sketchbook

Location: Linna, a half-elf True spy, is an assistant to Myrak Vemet, the owner of Athas Revealed (*Dark Sun Campaign Guide*, page 140). She reports anyone who asks questions about the areas of Under-Tyr where the True operates.

Location: Although dangerous, the Screaming Cellar (*Dark Sun Campaign Guide*, page 140) is one way to access Under-Tyr and reach the True's base. Recent rumors claim that the screaming comes from a dwarf banshee, which will grant access to those who help it complete the dwarven focus it had chosen while still living.

Plot: Sartaj, a Veiled Alliance cell leader with links to Altaruk, believes that the True is preparing to enter the ziggurat to conduct a terrible ritual. She seeks heroes to defeat the group. Her efforts are stymied by an influential Veiled Alliance teacher named Marama, who argues that there is no danger. He has been turned to the cause of the True and betrays the characters at an inopportune moment.

The True in Combat

The ruthlessness of Murter Dyan and the elemental research of Obadias has made the True into a formidable adversary.

The members of the True detailed below make up the upper echelon of the group. As former bodyguards and gladiators, guardians and weapon mages combine skill in weapons with corrupted arcane energy to harry opponents and protect their cells. Mirage weavers act primarily as spies and negotiators, combining psionics with elemental energy to create powerful illusions. Corruptors, able to drain life from others, are the masterminds responsible for arcane research, often in concert with human defilers.

Members of the True are often human, but other races are represented. The triggered action powers from this article can be added to Dark Sun humanoids (dragonborn/dray, dwarves, elves, goliaths/half-giants, halflings, humans, and mul) as theme powers to create a consistent feel in a True-based campaign. The defiler monster theme, ravenous powers, and shadowborn monster theme can also help turn mundane creatures into agents of the True.

Lower-status cells in the True are made up of less experienced members. The defiler assassin, dwarf sunpriest, elven assassin, goliath enforcer, and human fire elementalist are great choices for lower-level encounters. The True trains creatures such as baazrags, braxats, and jhakars as guardian pets. When traversing the wilderness, the True favors fast-moving mounts such as crodlus and kanks. Defilers summon silt elementals and magma elementals for important missions.

Black Sand

All the True members presented here can defile the land, creating black sand. This sand poisons the landscape and any creature that passes through it.

Effect: A creature in a square of black sand regains half the normal number of hit points.

True Guardian **Level 10 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 500

HP 106; **Bloodied** 53 **Initiative** +9
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +6
Speed 5
Resist 5 necrotic

Standard Actions

⊕ **Alhulak** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 9 damage, or 25 damage plus 2d8 necrotic damage if the guardian scores a critical hit.
Effect: The target grants combat advantage until it hits or misses the guardian with an attack.

Minor Actions

True Devotion ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The guardian can end any number of dazed, immobilized, restrained, or slowed effects, taking 5 damage for each effect ended in this way.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Alhulak Trip** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the guardian willingly shifts.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 2 (the triggering enemy); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 damage, or 25 damage plus 2d8 necrotic damage if the guardian scores a critical hit, and the target falls prone.

Defiling Strike (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The guardian hits with *alhulak*.
Effect (Free Action): The target also takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and the ground in a close burst 1 centered on the guardian becomes black sand.

Skills Athletics +15, Endurance +14
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 15 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+6)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 15 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+6)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment carapace scale armor, bone shield, alhulak

True Weapon Mage **Level 10 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 500

HP 105; **Bloodied** 52 **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +7
Speed 6
Resist 5 necrotic

Standard Actions

⊕ **Whip** (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + 4 fire damage, and the mage slides the target up to 3 squares.

⊕ **Carrikal** (thunder, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 9 thunder damage, and the mage can push the target 1 square and knock the target prone.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **True Believer** ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The mage is first bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The mage makes a melee basic attack with a +2 bonus to the attack roll and the damage roll.

Defiling Strike (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The mage hits with a melee basic attack.
Effect (Free Action): The target also takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and the ground in a close burst 1 centered on the mage becomes black sand.

Skills Arcana +14, Intimidate +12
Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 17 (+8) **Int** 18 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Primordial
Equipment leather armor, carrikal, whip

True Mirage Weaver **Level 10 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 500

HP 81; **Bloodied** 40 **Initiative** +13
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22 **Perception** +14
Speed 6
Resist 5 necrotic

Traits

☼ **Shimmering Veil** (illusion) ✦ **Aura** 1
The weaver has concealment against enemies outside the aura. If the weaver takes radiant damage, this aura is deactivated until the start of the weaver's next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 3d4 + 9 damage.

⊛ **Ashen Bolt** (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 4 lightning damage.

✧ **Illusionary Silt Blast** (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Defiling Strike (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The weaver hits with *ashen bolt*.
Effect (Free Action): The target also takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and the ground in a close burst 1 centered on the weaver becomes black sand.

Mirage (illusion, teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The weaver is hit by an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The weaver teleports up to 5 squares, and it becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it hits or misses with an attack. An illusion of the weaver appears in the square the weaver left. The illusion has the weaver's defenses and *shimmering veil*, but it can take no actions and disappears if hit by an enemy attack power.

Skills Arcana +14, Bluff +11, Insight +14, Stealth +14
Str 11 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 19 (+9)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 13 (+6)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Primordial
Equipment robes, obsidian dagger, obsidian orb

True Corruptor	Level 10 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 500
HP 81; **Bloodied** 40	**Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23	**Perception** +8
Speed 6	
Resist 5 necrotic	

Standard Actions

Life Drain (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 or ranged 10 (one creature); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends).

Corrupt the Land (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed and cannot regain hit points (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Defiling Strike (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The corruptor hits with *life drain*.
Effect (Free Action): Ongoing necrotic damage from *life drain* increases to 20, and the ground in a close burst 1 centered on the corruptor becomes black sand.

Theft of Life ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the corruptor regains hit points.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Close burst 10 (triggering enemy in the burst); The target regains 10 fewer hit points, and the corruptor gains 10 temporary hit points.

Skills Arcana +13, Bluff +14		
Str 10 (+5)	**Dex** 16 (+8)	**Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 15 (+7)	**Int** 17 (+8)	**Cha** 19 (+9)
Alignment evil	**Languages** Common, Primordial	
Equipment robes, bone rod		

About the Author

Teos Abadía is an administrator, developer, and author for the Ashes of Athas organized play campaign, set in the Dark Sun campaign setting. He is a frequent contributor to a variety of organized play campaigns and more devoted to Athas than most druids. You can follow his musings on his community blog and on Twitter (@Alphastream). Fellow Ashes of Athas administrators Chad Brown, Derek Guder, and Chris Sims helped shape the True and provided insights used in this article.

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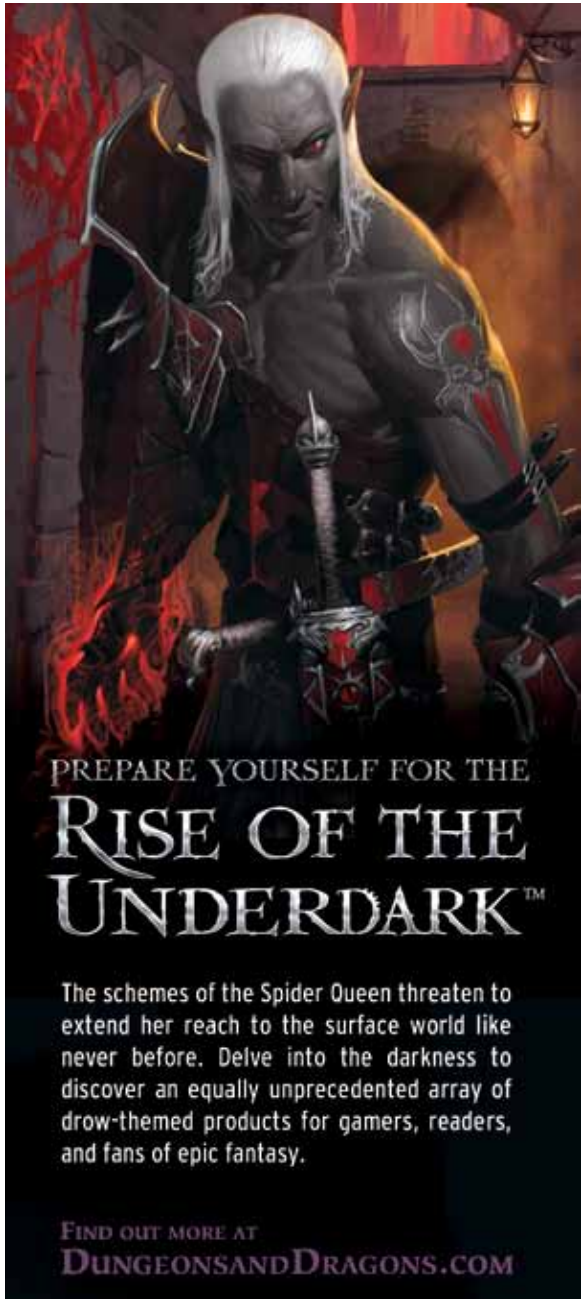
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Cruel as a Desert Wind

A D&D® Dark Sun® adventure for characters of levels 6-8

By Christopher Perkins

Illustrations by Noah Bradley, Michael Phillippi, James Zhang, Matt Dixon, and Tyler Walpole

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House Tsalaxa uses various legitimate trade ventures to conceal its blackmail, espionage, and assassination schemes. Its representatives are feared for their ruthlessness—and for their ability to strike without mercy when threatened. However, Athas holds forces even more ruthless than House Tsalaxa, as a band of adventurers is about to find out.

"Cruel as a Desert Wind" is a D&D adventure in the Dark Sun setting designed for characters of levels 6–8. Although it refers to locations in the world of Athas, the adventure can be transplanted to any desert-like setting with a few name changes.

Background

Between the warring city-states of Raam and Draj lies a vast tract of windblown sand and dry, cracked earth crossed by a road worn down by merchant caravans and marching armies. Far from this road and out of sight stands a fortified outpost of House Tsalaxa,

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a powerful merchant house with emporiums in all major settlements. Under the watchful eye of an old schemer named Oathem Tsalaxa, the house keeps some of its most precious treasures under lock and key in this remote fort: kidnap victims whose families will do and pay anything to secure the safe return of their kin.

Adventure Synopsis

Quan One-Eye, a legendary gladiator-turned-trainer in Raam, approaches the characters with a problem he can't fix. Representatives of House Tsalaxa, a powerful merchant family, have kidnapped Quan's only living son, Kelek. As long as Quan does what is asked of him, agents of the house guarantee that his son will be treated well. They've instructed Quan to poison the drinking water of certain gladiators to ensure the outcome of key fights in the city's arena. If Quan refuses, his son will meet a terrible end.

Formerly a champion of the people, Quan has numerous friends in Raam, and he has learned through his modest network that House Tsalaxa has a secret outpost hidden in the desert halfway between Raam and its nearest neighbor, Draj (where House Tsalaxa is based). Quan thinks his son might be a prisoner in the fort and is at the mercy of Oathem Tsalaxa, who serves as the outpost's overseer.

If the adventurers agree to help him, Quan puts them into contact with Avgar, a crodlu breeder in Raam who made a lot of money years ago betting on Quan's fights. As a favor to the former gladiator (and because he detests House Tsalaxa utterly), Avgar loans the characters crodlu mounts to expedite their journey to the Tsalaxa fort.

The overland journey isn't easy, but the characters reach the fort, the perimeter of which is guarded by ambush drakes. Oathem Tsalaxa also employs half-giants (goliaths) to guard the fort and to serve as protection while he conducts business with customers wishing to buy his latest acquisitions. Unlike the slaves offered up in major settlements, Oathem's prisoners are particularly desirable because they fetch tidy ransoms. Each victim has ties to someone House Tsalaxa is extorting or blackmailing.

The characters arrive at the outpost shortly after a notorious slavehunter named Arra shows up. Working for a templar in Draj who needs ransom money to fund his expensive rituals, she hopes to buy one or more prisoners from her old friend Oathem. One of those prisoners is the daughter of a Tyrian merchant who is sure to pay handsomely for her safe return. The daughter has fallen in love with Quan's son, Kelek, and now doesn't want to be torn from him.

Oathem sees this as an opportunity to extort more money from the girl's father (for surely he would pay not only for the safe return of his daughter but also her new lover). Arra would rather purchase both prisoners so that she could murder Kelek before the young girl's eyes, just to teach the spoiled brat a lesson in cruelty.

The adventurers can wait until Arra's retinue departs the outpost, but that might mean the end of poor Kelek. On the other hand, if they attack the fort before Arra's retinue leaves, they are outnumbered. They can try sneaking into the fort to capture Oathem, hoping he gives up the prisoners in exchange for his own life. Ultimately, the choice is theirs.

If the adventurers prevail and wrest control of the fort from Oathem and his goliaths, their victory is cut short by the arrival of Vaarduun, an elder dust devil making its way across the desert. This powerful creature cares nothing for the adventurers, the slavers, or their politics. It seeks only to destroy everything in its path before resuming its tireless trek.

If they survive the fury of Vaarduun, the adventurers must overcome one more threat: a gang of aarakocras scavengers following in the elemental's wake. After the aarakocras are defeated, the adventurers can make their way back to civilization, with or without Kelek and his new girlfriend in tow.

Beginning the Adventure

The adventure begins with a clandestine meeting in the back alleys of Raam. Start by giving them an overview of what brought them here before jumping into the dialogue with Quan. You can use the read-aloud text to set the stage.

When you are ready to begin, read:

It's the middle of the night and the city is asleep. But not you. At the appointed hour, you skulk quietly through the tangled maze of back alleys until a familiar figure in a dusty robe steps out of the shadows to greet you.

Quan is an old friend who fought his way up through the gladiatorial ranks, until an unlucky swipe of a sword took out his right eye. Now he trains the city's finest fighters. Three weeks ago, agents of the corrupt House Tsalaxa kidnapped Quan's teenaged son Kelek. Quan was told that if he ever wanted to see Kelek again, Quan needed to poison the drinking water of several gladiators to ensure specific outcomes in the gladiatorial games.

After the characters greet Quan, read:

"I cannot betray my warrior brothers to save my son, but I am not without friends in this city. I've learned that the bastards have a fort in the desert halfway between Raam and Draj. It's far from the trade road, but not hard to find if one knows where to look. According to my sources, the fort is run by an old snake named Oathem Tsalaxa. Kelek's kidnappers were goliaths known to do business with him.

"Not far from here lives a man named Avgar. He breeds crodlus, he's won a lot of gold on my fights over the years, and he despises House Tsalaxa as much as I do. He will provide you with mounts if you wish them. He's expecting friends of mine to show up at sunrise.

"If you will do me the favor of bringing my son home, I will be in your debt."

Quan provides accurate directions to the House Tsalaxa fort.

Characters who are known to be friends of Quan are treated well by the common citizens of the city. Additionally, a number of rich citizens hold Quan in high regard. If the characters successfully rescue Kelek, they will have earned an influential ally who can help them in the future. Quan also maintains a secret stash of magic items from his days as a gladiator, and he gladly parts with one or two of them to save his son's life. If the characters ask for payment, he offers to give them a +2 *carnage greatsword* or a suit of +2 *scorpion carapace plate armor* (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 125) on completion of the quest. He gives up both items if pressed or if the characters enact a particularly spectacular vengeance against House Tsalaxa and its agents.

The crodlu breeder Avgar has built a large crodlu pen around his tidy, clay-roofed hovel. Inside this pen, he keeps a half dozen trained crodlu mounts, as well as several smaller crodlus in training.

When the characters meet Avgar, read:

As the sun rises, you make your way to Avgar's small farm. A half dozen trained crodlus regard you calmly, but the smaller untrained creatures screech nervously as you approach. The noise rouses an elderly human male from the nearby hovel. As he emerges, he gives you a toothless smile.

"You must be Quan's friends. I have some fine beasts for you, and would be grateful if you returned them alive. They'll just need water, which I'll provide."

Avgar would be destitute or dead had he not won money betting on Quan in the arena years ago, and he is eager to help the old gladiator.

Avgar also has his own reasons for despising House Tsalaxa. A few months ago, a Tsalaxa agent visited his farm and offered him a stall in the Tsalaxa emporium, where he could sell his trained beasts for a modest fee. Avgar declined the offer, and shortly thereafter someone stole four of his prized crodlus. He knows House Tsalaxa is responsible.

Avgar gives each character a trained war crodlu and describes the creatures' *pounce* and *pouncing mount* powers. Each crodlu comes with a saddle, a set of reins, and two full water skins made of stitched jhakar hide. The water is enough to keep the crodlus healthy for the journey to the fort and back.

War Crodlu Level 5 Brute
Large natural beast (mount, reptile) XP 200

HP 76; **Bloodied** 38 **Initiative** +5
AC 17, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15 **Perception** +3
Speed 8

Standard Actions

⊕ **Beak** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.

⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage.

⸸ **Pounce** ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The crodlu can move its speed. Whether or not it moves, it can use *beak* and *claws*, making each attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target also falls prone.

Triggered Actions

Pouncing Mount (mount) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The crodlu charges an enemy while mounted by a friendly rider of level 5 or higher.
Effect (No Action): The crodlu's rider can make a melee basic attack as a free action against the target of the crodlu's charge.

Str 20 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 16 (+5)	**Int** 3 (-2)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Quests

The characters can pick up the following quests after speaking with Quan One-Eye and Avgar.

Rescue Kelek

7th-level Major Quest (300 XP/character)
By returning Kelek alive and well to his father in Raam, the adventurers complete this quest and earn the former gladiator's undying gratitude.

Return the Crodlus

6th-level Minor Quest (50 XP/character)
For every crodlu mount the characters return alive to Avgar, each character receives 50 XP.

Events

Riding crodlus, it takes the party three days to cross the desert and reach the fort. If the characters choose to walk, add 1d3 + 1 days to the journey. The crodlus can give the characters an edge during the encounters in Event 1. Subsequent events in the adventure play out the same way regardless of how long it takes the characters to reach the fort.

The overland trek to the Tsalaxa fort is covered in Event 1. The party's assault on the fort and the subsequent attacks by Vaarduun and the aarakocra are encapsulated by Events 2, 3, and 4.

Event 1: Desert Trek

Before running this event, review the rules for mounted combat (*Rules Compendium*, page 252). This event covers the journey to the Tsalaxa fort. If the characters are not traveling by crodlu, adjust the read-aloud text and the length of the journey as appropriate.

As the adventurers cross the desert, read:
Avgar's battle-trained crodlus bear you along the Road of Kings and between two clusters of jagged mountains, known as the Right Gauntlet and the Left Gauntlet. A stern wind blows from the east, carrying hot air, dust, and the stench of searing decay. After your long day's journey, the molten sun begins to sink behind the mountains.

The first day of travel passes uneventfully, but the following optional encounters can occur later. These encounters take place outdoors on open ground, so use whatever maps and terrain you like.

Night 1: For Whom the Bells Toll

Combat Encounter Level 7 (1,725 XP)

A belgoi hunting party is scouring the desert for game when the creatures spot the adventurers' camp and approach. Have each character make a DC 24 Perception check (at a –5 penalty if asleep). If at least one character succeeds, the adventurers are not surprised when the belgoi attack.

Monsters: The hunting party travels on foot, and consists of a belgoi caller, a belgoi hunter, a belgoi stalker, and five belgoi craven (see the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*™, pages 16–17, for statistics).

Tactics: The belgoi draw enemies toward them using their bells. They focus their attacks to bloody their foes and benefit from *hungry for blood*.

The belgoi ignore the crodlus, preferring the flesh of humanoids and believing that they gain power from the prey they consume.

Treasure: The belgoi bells are made of ivory and crystal (seven bells, 50 gp each). The belgoi caller's bell is made of enameled silver and gold (100 gp).

2 Tsalaxa Defilers — **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human — XP 350 each

HP 69; **Bloodied** 34 — **Initiative** +4
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 — **Perception** +10
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Defiling Flame** (fire, necrotic) ✦ **Aura** 2
Whenever the defiler uses an implement power, each enemy in the aura takes 5 fire and necrotic damage.

Standard Actions

⨺ **Devouring Staff** (fire, necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 fire and necrotic damage.

⨺ **Withering Flame** (fire, implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: Ongoing 10 fire and necrotic damage (save ends).

✲ **Elemental Eruption** (fire, implement, thunder) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 fire and thunder damage, and the target falls prone. If the target is taking ongoing damage, it is also dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Triggered Actions

Defiling Magic (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Trigger: The defiler makes an attack roll or a damage roll.
Effect (Free Action): The defiler can reroll the triggering roll. Each ally within 10 squares of the defiler takes 15 necrotic damage, which cannot be reduced in any way.

Skills Arcana +14, Nature +10

Str 9 (+3)	**Dex** 10 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 15 (+6)	**Int** 20 (+9)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment robes, staff

Day 2: Braxat Run

Combat Encounter Level 7 (1,500 XP)

A House Tsalaxa patrol spots the party crossing the barren wastes. Have the characters make DC 16 Perception checks to spot the patrol. If at least one character succeeds, the party is not surprised.

To begin the encounter, read:
Where the sand gives way to a parched wasteland of rocky outcroppings and stunted cacti, two ten-foot-tall giants with stony hides shamble into view. Strapped to the back of each giant is a tall basket holding a staff-wielding human in desert robes. Spotting you, the giants charge with alarming speed.

House Tsalaxa employs braxat-riding defilers to keep intruders from reaching Oathem's secret fort.

Monsters: Two human defilers ride in baskets lashed to a pair of braxat juveniles (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 18).

Tactics: The braxats can keep up with the party's war crodlus over short distances without tiring. As they move to intercept the characters, the defilers make ranged and area attacks against the adventurers and their mounts. In close combat, the defilers dismount and the braxats wade into melee.

Treasure: Each defiler's staff is capped with a dark, cracked ruby (250 gp each). The defilers also carry cactus water in baazrag-skin canteens.

Night 2: Oasis of Terror

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,250 XP)

A small oasis east of Raam holds the promise of a pleasant night's rest, until the adventurers fall prey to an ancient tembo that has turned the oasis into its private killing ground.

To begin the encounter, read:
As the sun sets once more, your gaze is drawn to an oasis barely thirty feet in diameter. Stands of cacti surround a pool that has three trees with umbrella-shaped fronds.

The sun-warmed water cools overnight, and the water is clean and drinkable.

Monster: The tembo (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 94) lives and fights alone. It is careful not

to leave tracks or other signs of its presence, waiting until the dead of night to attack. In addition to its normal powers, this tembo has the ability to cloak itself in illusion, and it has assumed the appearance of one of the barrel cacti encircling the oasis.

Minor Actions

Deceptive Veil (illusion) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)

Effect: The tembo disguises itself to appear as an inanimate plant or object until it uses another illusion power or until it drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 28 Insight check to discern that the form is an illusion.

Tactics: The tembo uses *blending* to become invisible. Characters standing guard can attempt a DC 23 Perception check to notice a cactus disappear. The tembo then uses Stealth to approach the nearest adventurer to initiate combat.

The tembo's preferred tactic is to use *raking assault* to attack two different enemies, then follow up with *unspeakable violation* against the second foe. While it waits for *unspeakable violation* to recharge, it continues making *raking assault* attacks while confounding enemies with its auras and its *shadow evasion* power.

If the characters flee, the tembo tirelessly pursues them, following its prey until it feeds or is slain.

Day 3: Fort on the Horizon

At the end of their journey, the characters catch sight of the Tsalaxa fort. Proceed with Event 2.

Event 2: The Tsalaxa Fort

Combat Encounter Level Varies (see below)

The House Tsalaxa forces guarding the fort constitute one encounter (Level 9; 2,300 XP). Arra the slave hunter's retinue constitutes the other (Level 7; 1,600 XP). If the characters attack the fort while Arra's retinue is present, the party has to fight a larger force (Level 12; 3,900 XP).

Map: A map of the fort appears on page 12.

Monsters: Oathem Tsalaxa (human overseer), 2 ambush drakes, 8 goliath thugs, Arra (human slave-hunter), 1 inix adult, 2 mul chainfighters.

Other Creatures: 5 human captives.

As the characters approach the fort, read:

Through blowing sand, you see the baked earth rise up toward a stone fortress surrounded by a twenty-foot-high wall. A few half-giant sentinels stand behind dusty battlements, looking out across the blasted desert with ballistas aimed and ready to fire. A building inside the fortress has a watchtower, atop which another goliath stands. The thick wooden doors that guard the entrance stand open.

Scouting: Characters who survey the fortress count four goliaths on the wall (each standing in easy reach of a ballista) and a fifth atop the watchtower. Any character who succeeds on a DC 21 Perception check spots the ambush drakes stealthily hunting outside the fort.

Stealth: If the characters wish to remain hidden from the fort's defenders, have them make a DC 16 group Stealth check. If at least half the characters succeed, their presence outside the fort goes unnoticed. Additional checks might be required if the characters move around a lot, at your discretion.

Trickery: If the characters try to bluff their way inside the fort by pretending to be interested slave buyers, have them make a DC 16 group Bluff check. Apply bonuses or penalties to the check based on how well the players roleplay the situation. If at least half the characters succeed on the check, the goliaths allow them to enter. The ambush drakes remain outside, but converge on the scene if combat erupts.

Tricking Oathem: Oathem Tsalaxa, the cruel human overseer, is the only member of House Tsalaxa present in the fort. He is a gangly, dark-skinned human male in his fifties, with sunken eyes, thinning white hair, and a stubbly white beard. When the characters first arrive, Oathem is in the courtyard showing off his prisoners to Arra and her mul bodyguards.

Any attempt to fool or negotiate with Oathem requires Bluff checks or Diplomacy checks opposed by the overseer's Insight check. Apply bonuses or penalties based on how well the players roleplay. If the characters fail in their attempts, Oathem suspects they are either deceiving him or that they have ulterior motives. In either case, he orders them to "leave at once or suffer an unkind fate." If the adventurers leave without a fuss, Oathem puts the fort on alert in case they decide to return. He also brings the ambush drakes into the fort and instructs the goliaths to seal the front gates.

Slave Deal

Shortly before the characters arrive at the fort, Oathem gathers his prisoners in the slave pit (area 3) so that Arra can inspect them and choose which ones she wishes to buy. Oathem takes the time to explain the value of each prisoner, and Arra quickly chooses Rhona Wardawn, the daughter of a merchant from Tyr. Rhona begs Arra not to separate her from Kelek, prompting Arra to buy both prisoners with the gems she carries. Out of sheer malice, Arra decides to slay Kelek and teach Rhona a cruel lesson regarding the folly of love. The slavehunter makes her intentions clear to Oathem before concluding the deal.

Unless the characters intervene or make a better offer, Oathem accepts the gems and allows Arra's muls to pull Rhona and Kelek out of the pit. One of Arra's muls forces Rhona to watch as Arra knocks Kelek to his knees and bludgeons him to death with her mace. Arra then puts Rhona in the inix's howdah and prepares to leave the fort.

Oathem whistles for his ambush drakes. The overseer chuckles gleefully as the drakes fly over the wall and begin feasting on Kelek's remains. Arra again forces Rhona to watch.

Saving Kelek: The characters should be given every chance to interrupt the deal between Oathem and Arra, preventing Kelek's murder. It is up to you to decide how far the negotiations have progressed by the time the characters reach the interior of the fort. For example, if the characters brazenly storm the fort or sneak inside, they might stall the negotiations indefinitely. Anything the characters can do to shift

Human Overseer **Level 9 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 400

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +4
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 23 **Perception** +12
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Mental Mire** ✦ **Aura** 2
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⨁ **Obsidian Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

⚚ **Not So Fast** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the overseer pulls the target up to 3 squares.

✧ **Do My Bidding** (charm) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 2 (one slowed creature in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated until the end of the overseer's next turn.

Skills Bluff +14, Diplomacy +14, Insight +12, Intimidate +14
Str 13 (+5) **Dex** 10 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 15 (+6) **Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, obsidian longsword

2 Ambush Drakes **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 250 each

HP 71; **Bloodied** 35 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 **Perception** +3
Speed 6, fly 4 (clumsy)

Standard Actions

⨁ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.

⨺ **Shifting Strike** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.
Effect: The drake can shift 1 square before or after the attack.

Minor Actions

Ravenous ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The drake must be bloodied.
Effect: The drake shifts up to 2 squares to a square closer to a bloodied enemy.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 16 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 3 (-1) **Cha** 6 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

8 Goliath Thugs	Level 4 Brute
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175 each
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32	**Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15	**Perception** +4
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Greatclub** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage.	
Minor Actions	
⸸ **Push Through** ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The goliath can push the target 1 square, knock it prone, and shift 1 square into the square the target vacated.	
Stone's Endurance ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The goliath gains resist 5 to all damage until the end of its next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Vengeful Clout** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The goliath drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +10, Nature +11	
Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common	
Equipment hide armor, greatclub	

the villains' attention away from the prisoners helps prolong Kelek's life.

House Tsalaxa Roster

Four goliath thugs stand watch on the outer wall (area 1), looking for signs of trouble and staying within easy reach of the ballistas. Four others sleep in tents in the courtyard (area 4). The ambush drakes are outside the fort, patrolling the surrounding area. Their exact locations are left up to you.

Tactics: The ambush drakes stalk the rocky landscape outside the fort. When one detects intruders, it roars to alert the fort's other denizens. The ambush drakes prefer to gang up on one enemy at a time. If the characters enter the fort and trigger a fight inside, the drakes fly over the wall to join the battle.

Oathem uses *not so fast* to pull an enemy into his aura, then uses *do my bidding* to compel the enemy to turn against his or her allies. Although past his prime, the overseer enjoys battle and bloodshed.

If reduced to 24 hit points or fewer, Oathem barters for his life. He gladly gives up the prisoners in exchange for his own safety. If the characters try to leave the fort with the prisoners, Oathem uses Vaarduun's sudden arrival (see Event 3) as an opportunity to turn against the adventurers and win the prisoners back.

Goliath thugs target enemies with the ballistas from the wall (area 1). The goliaths sleeping at the start of the battle join the fray at the start of the second round, starting prone. They and any other goliath forced into melee fight with their greatclubs.

Tsalaxa Ballistas: These weapons stand at six points along the wall, and are made of wood, bone, and other organic materials. They shoot barrages of arrows. Firing a ballista is a standard action, and aiming it in a different direction is a move action.

Standard Action
⊹ **Tsalaxa Ballista** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 50 (creatures in the burst); level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 10 damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Conclusion

If the fort defenders overcome the characters, Oathem has them bound with ropes (escape DC 28) and locked in dungeon cells until he determines whether they are important enough to ransom.

Treasure: Oathem hides the key to his vault (area 7) on his person. He also carries a *sending stone* that allows him to speak with a mul spy named Jelarn, who works for Oathem in Draj and is his primary contact in the outside world.

Arra's Retinue

Arra hails from Draj. She has come to the outpost to procure hostages for her master, an evil templar who intends to ransom them. Arra stands an imposing six feet tall, with dark skin and black hair pulled back in a long braid. Two mul chainfighters attend her, and an inix serves as her mount.

Tactics: Arra considers herself a friend of Oathem's, and she orders her muls to protect the overseer while she climbs onto the back of her inix, knocks enemies prone with her whip, then uses *cutting lash* against them. Neither she nor the muls are afraid to die, and they would all rather perish in combat than suffer the indignities of surrender.

Treasure: Lashed to the inix are four 5-gallon jugs of fresh water (filled from the pool in area 8). Arra carries a pouch containing five gems (500 gp each), which she intends to give to Oathem in trade for the slaves.

The Prisoners

Oathem is currently watching over five human prisoners plucked from various nearby cities. These unfortunate abductees have blood ties to individuals whom House Tsalaxa is either blackmailing or extorting.

Kelek: Kelek is the teenaged son of Quan One-Eye and the apprentice of a jeweler in Raam. He's been a prisoner in the fort for three weeks and is head over heels in love with Rhona. Kelek won't voluntarily leave the fort without her.

Rhona Wardawn: Growing violence in Tyr prompted a human merchant named Vadarek Wardawn to place his only daughter on a caravan leaving the city. House Tsalaxa caught wind of the opportunity and sent raiders to abduct Rhona. She arrived a month ago and has since fallen in love with Kelek, despite both being confined to separate cells. Rhona's father has significant debts and can't afford to pay a ransom or a reward for his daughter's rescue. He has

Human Slavehunter	Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 500
HP 103; **Bloodied** 51	**Initiative** +12
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 20	**Perception** +13
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Mace** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage, and the slavehunter shifts 1 square	
⸸ **Obsidian-Toothed Whip** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 9 damage, and the slavehunter pulls the target 1 square and knocks it prone.	
Minor Actions	
Swift Pursuit ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Effect: The slavehunter shifts 3 squares.	
⸸ **Cutting Lash** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +13 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: Ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Skills Athletics +15, Bluff +11, Intimidate +11	
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+8)	
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+6)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common	
Equipment chitin armor, obsidian-toothed whip, mace	

Inix Adult	Level 9 Brute
Large natural beast (mount, reptile)	XP 400
HP 120; **Bloodied** 60	**Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 21	**Perception** +7
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC. While the inix has a creature grabbed, it can use *bite* against the grabbed creature only.	
Hit: 3d8 + 6 damage. If the target is prone, it takes 1d8 extra damage, is grabbed (escape DC 17), and cannot stand up until the grab ends.	
⇲ **Tail Slap** ✦ **Recharge** ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚃	
Attack: Close blast 2 (enemies in the blast); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage, and the inix pushes the target up to 2 squares and knocks it prone.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Warding Tail** (mount) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The inix has a friendly rider of 9th level or higher mounted on it, and the rider is hit by an opportunity attack provoked by a ranged attack or an area attack.	
Effect (Free Action): The inix uses *tail slap* in an area that includes the creature that made the triggering attack.	
Str 22 (+10) **Dex** 13 (+5) **Wis** 17 (+7)	
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

2 Mul Chainfighters	Level 8 Brute
Medium natural humanoid	XP 350 each
HP 106; **Bloodied** 53	**Initiative** +6
AC 20, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19	**Perception** +6
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Cahulaks** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2, or Melee 1 while the chainfighter has a creature grabbed (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d6 + 6 damage.	
⸸ **Ensnaring Tines** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d6 + 6 damage, and the chainfighter pulls the target 1 square. If the target ends the pull adjacent to the chainfighter, the chainfighter grabs the target (escape DC 16). The chainfighter can grab only one target at a time.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Wicked Ensnarement** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the chainfighter attempts to escape the chainfighter's grab and fails.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (the triggering enemy); +11 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d8 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Incredible Toughness ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The chainfighter starts its turn.	
Effect (No Action): The chainfighter ends one effect that includes ongoing damage and the dazed, the slowed, the stunned, or the weakened condition.	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 15 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+6)	
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment hide armor, cahulaks	

friends in the Veiled Alliance, so he could arrange introductions for the adventurers.

Tropus M'ret: This impetuous young human male was the favored concubine of a noble in Nibenay until he was abducted two months ago. In exchange for Tropus's safe return, the noble is bribing officials and covering up assassinations perpetrated by House Tsalaxa in the city.

Tropus likes to ruffle feathers. A goliath thug broke his arm after he called Oathem a "spineless, dried-up old cactus." Tropus also made a crude pass at Rhona when she first arrived but was rebuffed, so now he's jealous of Kelek. If Kelek is killed, he does his best to console Rhona, hoping to win favor with her.

Virij Bzanavar: Before being captured three months ago, this elderly human male from Nibenay ran a small but successful business that manufactured and sold clay bricks. (Many of his bricks were sold to agents of House Tsalaxa and went into building this fort.) House Tsalaxa expected Virij's two sons and daughter to pay the ransom at once, but payment has been delayed due to family politics. (The eldest son doesn't want his father back.) Virij has a secret cache that only he knows about, and he's willing to pay the party 2,500 gp for helping him escape and return to Nibenay alive.

5 Human Captives	Level 4 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +5	
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16	**Perception** +3
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Rope Garrote** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 6 damage, and the captive grabs the target (escape DC 14). Until the grab ends, the captive cannot attack, and the target takes 6 damage at the start of each of its turns and a -2 penalty to attack rolls.	
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment binding ropes	

Xelani Avarosa: This middle-aged human female is the wife of an arms merchant from Balic. Four months ago, she accompanied her husband on a trade mission to Draj and was kidnapped after she advised him not to do business with House Tsalaxa. The house is close to securing a large consignment of weapons from Xelani's husband, to be resold on Draj's black market. If Xelani were to escape before the deal is concluded, House Tsalaxa would be stuck with orders it can't fill and a number of furious warlords. If the characters reunite Xelani with her husband, he grants them a favor that they can collect in a future time of need.

Fort Locations

The following areas are keyed to the map of the fort.

1. Outer Wall

These walls are made of large, fitted clay bricks (DC 25 Athletics to climb). A battlement encloses the wall, whose top is 20 feet above the ground.

Stairways: These stairs are difficult terrain while ascending them and normal terrain otherwise.

2. Front Gates

These thick, 15-foot-high wooden doors are usually open. In times of need, they can be closed and sealed with two bone crossbars (each crossbar requires a standard action to place). The sealed gates can be forced open with a DC 30 Athletics check (DC 36 if both crossbars are in place).

3. Slave Pit

When Oathem entertains clients, he ushers prisoners to this pit. Prospective buyers stand just out of reach to scrutinize the "merchandise."

The 15-foot-wide, 10-foot-deep pit is hewn from cracked rock and dry clay. The crumbling pit walls are difficult to climb (Athletics DC 25). A 5-foot-wide, 6-foot-high tunnel leads from the pit to the dungeon (area 10). A wooden gate at the mouth of the tunnel is unlocked when the pit is not being used and lashed shut with ropes otherwise. The ropes require four standard actions to lash or unlash.

4. Courtyard Tents

These oversized tents are made of stitched animal hide. Each one contains two goliath-sized sleeping pallets. A pit for a cooking fire has been dug out nearby, but the fire is rarely lit.

Treasure: Searching each tent yields various mundane belongings of little value, as well as two leather pouches that each contain 1d100 gp.

5. Greeting Hall

Oathem concludes business transactions here. (He knows Arra well enough to dispense with such pleasantries.) Four chairs surround a table, atop which is a clay decanter of water and four clay mugs. A tortoiseshell bowl contains dates, and a clay jar holds straws made from cactus needles.

A spiral staircase ascends area 9, while another descends to area 10. Red drapes hang in archways leading to areas 6 and 8.

6. Overseer's Quarters

Oathem sleeps here when he's not tormenting his prisoners or conducting business transactions. The room contains a comfortable bed and little else. Oathem keeps his valuables locked away in area 7.

7. Overseer's Vault

The stone door to this room is locked (DC 24 Thievery to open) and has a *psychic glyph* placed on it. Oathem's key allows the door to be opened without triggering the trap.

Treasure: Hooks and niches hold various goods, including food for the fort. Even if the party doesn't want to risk combat against the water elemental to access the water supply (see area 8), the food, water, and supplies found in the vault and elsewhere in the fort provide 40 survival days.

Oathem's treasure is contained in a stone coffer, and it consists of 850 gp (money Oathem uses to pay the goliath thugs), blank vellum scrolls, a set of ornate quills made from kank spines and kestrekel feathers (50 gp), a 50-foot coil of wyrmsilk rope (50 gp), a +2 *hidden dagger* (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 125) with a blade made of sharpened scorpion chitin and a grip designed to hold poison (or substitute another

Psychic Glyph	Level 7 Trap
Object	XP 300
Detect Arcana or Perception DC 23	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	
Triggered Actions	
⇢ **Attack** (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: A creature touches the object bearing the glyph.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d6 + 4 psychic damage. If the damage reduces any target to 0 hit points or fewer, the target is not dying but is unconscious until it has 1 or more hit points.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 23 (standard action). *Success:* The trap is disabled. *Failure (18 or lower):* The trap triggers.	

level 8 uncommon item), and four *agony beetles* (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 129) that Oathem uses to torture prisoners. The vault also contains a ledger of Oathem's transactions for the last year, which you can use as a hook for further adventures.

8. Water Supply

Murals cover the walls here, depicting a verdant jungle full of predatory beasts and dangerous plants. A narrow, 1-foot-high stone lip encloses a sunken 5-foot-deep pool of fresh water.

Water Elemental	**Level 11 Controller**
Medium elemental magical beast (aquatic, water)	XP 600
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55	**Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, swim 6	
Vulnerable cold (see sensitive to cold)	
Traits	
Aquatic	
The elemental can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Sensitive to Cold	
Whenever the elemental takes cold damage, it gains vulnerable 5 against the next attack that hits it before the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Whirlpool ✦ Encounter	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d6 + 7 damage, and the elemental slides the target up to 3 squares.	
Minor Actions	
Drowning Essence ✦ At-Will (1/round)	
Effect: The elemental slides each creature that has ongoing damage from its *slam* up to 2 squares.	
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+5)	
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Primordial	

Monster: House Tsalaxa sorcerers confined a water elemental here to provide for the fort's needs. Detecting the water elemental while it is dormant requires a DC 23 Arcana check or Perception check.

If anyone other than Oathem disturbs the pool, the water elemental attacks. It cannot leave the pool of its own volition, but if it is pulled, pushed, or slid out of the pool's square, it is freed from its magical bindings and goes on a rampage, attacking all other creatures (including Oathem) until destroyed.

Tactics: The elemental uses *whirlpool* and *drowning essence* to slide enemies within reach of its *slam* attacks. If it has no targets, it sinks back into the pool.

9. Watchtower

Stone battlements enclose the watchtower roof, which stands 30 feet above the courtyard and offers an unobstructed view of the surrounding desert. A narrow spiral staircase descends to area 5.

10. Dungeon

This underground area is cooler than the chambers above it. Five stone cells with doors made of lashed bone bars line the north wall. Oathem's prisoners are confined here.

Trap: The cell doors are trapped with *psychic glyphs* identical to the one protecting Oathem's vault (see area 7). The glyphs deter the prisoners from tampering with the ropes that keep the doors shut.

Event 3: Fury of Vaarduun

Combat Encounter Level 7 (1,600 XP)

In this part of the adventure, the characters encounter a creature far more powerful than the foes they have already faced. An elder dust devil, Vaarduun is a swirling elemental composed of air and earth. A powerful defiler summoned Vaarduun years before, but the elemental took umbrage at being torn from the Elemental Chaos.

Elder Dust Devil **Level 17 Controller**
Huge elemental magical beast (air, earth) XP 1,600

HP 164; **Bloodied** 82 **Initiative** +14
AC 31, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 27 **Perception** +8
Speed 6, fly 6
Immune disease, poison

Traits

☼ **Sandblast ✦ Aura** 2
Enemies in the aura grant combat advantage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Grasping Winds ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 14 damage.
Effect: The dust devil slides the target up to 3 squares.

⸸ **Eye of the Vortex ✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is pulled into the dust devil's space, blinded, and restrained (save ends all). The effect also ends if the dust devil drops to 0 hit points. When the effect ends, the dust devil pushes the target up to 5 squares. If the target is bloodied, it falls prone.
Aftereffect: 2d6 + 5 damage.

⇦ **Devil's Fury ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +20 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and if the target is bloodied, it falls prone.
Effect: The dust devil slides the target up to 3 squares.

Move Actions

Tornado Grasp ✦ At-Will
Effect: The dust devil moves or flies up to its speed, and creatures in its space it are pulled with it, staying in the dust devil's space. The dust devil's movement provokes no opportunity attacks from creatures forced to move with it.

Str 24 (+15)	**Dex** 22 (+14)	**Wis** 10 (+8)
Con 20 (+13)	**Int** 5 (+5)	**Cha** 18 (+12)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

In a rage, the elemental broke free of its magical bonds, slew its summoner, and fled into the desert. Now, Vaarduun's trek across the wastes of Athas has driven it mad. As it races across the arid wastes, it leaves a path of destruction in its wake.

Recently, a tribe of aarakocra (see Event 4) has begun following the elder dust devil, hoping to take advantage of anyone who survives an encounter with the elemental. The aarakocras are cruel scavengers, and Vaarduun pays them little heed.

Vaarduun Attacks!

The exact timing of Vaarduun's arrival is up to you. Characters should have enough time to take a short rest after the previous encounters, but not enough time for an extended rest or to leave the fort. If the adventurers seem intent on leaving, Vaarduun appears before they have a chance to depart.

Monster: Vaarduun (elder dust devil).

When Vaarduun arrives, read:

From the east comes a sudden elemental roar. A twenty-foot-high, fifteen-foot-wide funnel of swirling air and sand cuts a swath across the desert. At first, it looks as though it might miss the fort. Then it suddenly alters course.

A flock of mangy avian humanoids follows the vortex from the air. They settle on distant rocks, watching as the cyclone bears down toward you.

Vaarduun comes from the east and circles the fort counterclockwise once before entering through the north gates, flying over the outer wall if the gates are closed. It attacks anyone in the courtyard or stationed atop the outer walls.

As it swirls through the courtyard, the elemental rips up the goliath tents (area 4) and pulls clay shingles off the main building (areas 5–8). It ignores creatures hidden in the main building, atop the watchtower (area 9), in the slave pit (area 3), or in the dungeon (area 10). When it has done any amount of damage and has no one left to attack, Vaarduun leaves and heads west across the desert.

Tsalaxa Ballistas: The ballistas atop the outer wall are effective weapons against the elder dust devil, since they deal damage even on a miss. A character who studies a ballista realizes this fact without having to fire the weapon.

Tactics: Vaarduun uses *grasping winds* and *eye of the vortex* against singular threats, switching to *devil's fury* against multiple enemies in close proximity.

Development

If Oathem or any of his allies are still alive when Vaarduun appears, they move indoors and avoid the elemental. Any surviving prisoners likewise take cover in the dungeon (area 10). However, if the adventurers are in control of the fort, other characters will do as they command, provided the adventurers' instructions aren't tantamount to suicide.

Conclusion

If the characters survive the encounter with Vaarduun, they receive 800 XP even if they don't defeat the elemental in combat.

Go to Event 4, allowing no time for a short rest.

Event 4: Scavengers

Combat Encounter Level 8 (1,980 XP)

A gang of aarakocras follows Vaarduun. As soon as the elemental leaves the fort, the creatures attack any survivors of its assault.

Monsters: Cesare (aarakocra windcaller), 4 aarakocra divers, 10 aarakocra warriors.

When the aarakocras attack, read:

The elemental threat has passed, but there's no time to rest before an unnerving shriek signals an attack from above you. More than a dozen winged humanoids descend from the sky with spears clutched in their wicked talons. One of the creatures screams, "No survivors!"

Cesare hit on the idea of following Vaarduun, but the elemental's attack on the fort is the windcaller's first opportunity to prove to his kin that the effort has been worth it. He is willing to sacrifice the other aarakocras to achieve victory.

Aarakocra Windcaller Level 8 Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid — XP 350

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 — **Initiative** +7
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21 — **Perception** +13
Speed 5, fly 6 — Low-light vision

Traits

Carrion Scent ✦ Aura 10
Allies in the aura gain a +4 power bonus to damage rolls against bloodied enemies and can hover if they have a fly speed.

Standard Actions

Wafting Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target falls prone.

Foul Gust ✦ At-Will
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d6 + 2 damage, and the windcaller slides the target up to 3 squares.

Dust Veil ✦ Recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d8 + 6 damage, and the target treats nonadjacent creatures as having partial concealment (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is blinded until the end of the windcaller's next turn.

Instant Whirlwind ✦ Encounter
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 2 damage, and the windcaller slides the target up to 4 squares and knocks it prone.
Effect: The windcaller slides allies in the blast up to 2 squares.

Move Actions

Sly Takeoff ✦ At-Will
Effect: The windcaller shifts 1 square and then flies up to 5 squares.

Skills Nature +13

Str 14 (+6)	**Dex** 17 (+7)	**Wis** 19 (+8)
Con 10 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+3)	**Cha** 12 (+5)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Common

Tactics: The divers and warriors swoop down to target bloodied prey first, then gang up on other characters in the hope of making them bloodied quickly. Cesare remains airborne if possible and uses his

4 Aarakocra Divers	Level 6 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 250 each
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33	**Initiative** +9
AC 20, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** +6
Speed 5, fly 6	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Longspear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Flyby Attack** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The diver flies 6 squares and uses *longspear* once at any point during the movement. Once during the move, when the diver has combat advantage against an enemy, it can use *bite* against that enemy. The diver doesn't provoke opportunity attacks for moving away from the target of either attack.	
⸸ **Diving Charge** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚃ ⚄ ⚅	
Effect: The diver charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack.	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Move Actions	
Sly Takeoff ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The diver shifts 1 square and then flies up to 5 squares.	
Minor Actions	
⸸ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to the diver); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 4 damage.	
Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+6)	
Con 10 (+3) **Int** 8 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment longspear	

aura to grant allies the ability to hover while making ranged attacks and close blast attacks against enemies on the ground. The windcaller flees when faced with certain defeat, abandoning his kin.

10 Aarakocra Warriors	Level 6 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 63 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +9
AC 20, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** +6
Speed 5, fly 6	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 7 damage, or 8 when charging.	
Move Actions	
Sly Takeoff ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The warrior shifts 1 square and then flies up to 5 squares.	
Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+6)	
Con 10 (+3) **Int** 8 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment spear	

Concluding the Adventure

After the aarakocras have been defeated or driven off, the adventurers can safely leave the fort and return to civilization. If the characters captured Oathem, he can be taken to face justice or to be used against House Tsalaxa. In this case, the overseer has friends in Draj who do their utmost to see him safely spirited back to the city.

Quan One-Eye knows that the attack on the fort has made the adventurers into enemies of House Tsalaxa, and he warns them to keep quiet about the raid and to watch their backs. He also feeds them information to aid them against Tsalaxa reprisals. If the characters choose to brag to others of their recent adventure, they soon face a full-scale Tsalaxa vendetta. Jelarn, a mul savage (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 77), is a friend of Oathem's who carries a *sending stone* paired with the overseer's. He travels from Draj with a team of assassins to dispose of the meddlesome adventurers.

If they both survived, Rhona Wardawn convinces Kelek to accompany her to Tyr. As much as Quan hates to lose his son again, he offers Kelek and Rhona his blessing. He is willing to pay the adventurers to escort the young lovers safely to the Free City.

The characters might also take it upon themselves to escort the other rescued prisoners to their home cities of Nibenay and Balic. These journeys are long and fraught with peril, but the rewards and adventure opportunities might be worth the risk.

About the Author

Christopher Perkins is the D&D Senior Producer at Wizards of the Coast. Although he's written adventures for a number of campaign settings over the years, this is his first visit to Athas.

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Traveling the Athasian Wastes

By Teos Abadia

Illustration by Chris Seaman

"Almost all of Athas is a desert wasteland, but that does not mean the landscape is monotonous. Far from it—over each hill, behind each dune, the terrain is more awesome, more spectacular, more beautiful than what you have already seen. In my travels, I have been overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of this land, cowed by its indifferent brutality, and overpowered by the unrestrained might of its elements."

—The Wanderer

One compelling aspect of the Dark Sun® setting is its diverse landscape. The environment and ecology of Athas have been worn and transformed by the ravages of war, defiling magic, and relentless exposure to the crimson sun. This article provides ideas for bringing to life seven common Athasian terrain types: scrub plains, sandy wastes, rocky badlands, stony barrens, salt flats, mudflats, and dust sinks. A sample encounter is provided for each terrain type.

Sources and Ideas

When crafting adventures in the Athasian wastes, the following considerations can heighten the difficulty and excitement of an encounter.

Dark Sun Campaign Setting: A Desert Primer (page 132) introduces each terrain type. Travel and Survival (page 198) discusses movement speeds for crossing terrain, the use of survival days, and the threats of sun sickness or night travel. The sample skill challenges Guiding a Caravan (page 206) and Surviving the Desert (page 207) can be customized to fit specific terrain types.

Dark Sun Creature Catalog: In addition to Athasian monsters, this book provides terrain powers, hazards, monster themes, and rules for creating Athasian versions of normal monsters.

D&D Insider: Several articles are of use. "Traveling the Sandswept Roads" (*Dragon* 391) has several maps of the Tablelands and provides distances and travel times between different regions. "Sunwarped Flats" (*Dungeon* 179) provides an additional terrain type. New monsters and monster themes are found in articles such as "Dark Sun Threats" (*Dungeon* 187).

Temperature, Season, and Lighting: Athas alternates between frigid nights and scorching days. The time of day changes the story behind the encounter, from waking in the dead of a chilly night to being attacked during the sweltering high sun. The seasons in Athas can increase temperatures and affect skill challenge DCs or the number of survival days necessary for a voyage. The light and visibility in encounters can vary significantly at night depending on the phases of Athas's two moons, Ral and Guthay. Daytime encounters can change if shadows are cast by terrain, creating areas of dim light or darkness.

Telling a Story Through Scavenging: Athas is a resource-poor world where scavenging can mean the

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difference between life and death, and these lessons can drive home aspects of the ecology. Living off the land becomes tangible when teeth scavenged from a tembo provide a bonus to weapon attacks for a few encounters. A History check or Nature check might inform the player characters that a certain tree fires dangerous thorns but also bears a nutritious fruit and a flower coveted by wealthy nobles.

Scrub Plains

Increasingly rare, scrub plains are areas of sandy or rocky terrain dotted by twisted cacti, thorny brush, and a few tall, thin, short-leafed trees. Morning dew or the trickle of underground springs provides precious water that sustains the flora and fauna. Pools of water are scarce and seldom without dangerous inhabitants or other threats.

Features

The abundance of life makes a nice change from the expected in an Athasian campaign, especially after voyages through barren areas. For a striking contrast, a scrub plain after a brief rain can erupt in bloom, filling the area with colorful flowers. So much living cover can heighten the feeling that predators must be lurking within (and they probably are). Encounters with defilers or druids can highlight the rare and delicate nature of this terrain.

Valuable plants are the treasures of scrub plains. Color images of real-world desert plants can help players visualize the amazing variety. The silver scuppernong berry grows on small bushes and can be made into a wine favored by elves. The dull yellow leaves of the succulent oleracea are a valued crop that can be eaten raw or cooked. Faro cacti blossom once a decade into fruit favored by nobles, and the needles can be ground into flour.

It is also possible to highlight a few desert plants by giving them special qualities. A party that has barely survived a harsh encounter might find relief in a rare plant that, when consumed, provides healing or some other form of recovery, such as allowing characters to regain a healing surge.

Plants can also be a significant hazard, even when nonsentient. Those with purple spots on their leaves and stems are known to be poisonous (especially to halflings and dwarves). With the proper skill and care, small applications of poison could be extracted.

Creatures

Any abundance of plants attracts animals. Scrub plains draw a wide variety of predators and prey, including most monsters in the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*. Herds of wild beasts could provide a chance for characters to procure a mount or survival days.

Elven tribes seek animals to fill their herds. Defilers covet vegetation that allows them to better fuel their spells until the area is destroyed. Druids and other primal guardians come for the opposite reason—to protect the land. They watch trespassers carefully, weighing their actions and savagely punishing those who take too much of the land's meager offerings. Tales of a druid's wrath fuel many Athasian superstitions.

Merchants and nobles might employ adventurers to find valuable plants or creatures. Templars or organizations such as the Veiled Alliance could hire characters to locate rare ingredients for rituals.

Silk Wyrm Nest

Encounter Level 3 940 XP

Silk wyrms create nests out of a fine silk prized in all the city-states (particularly Nibenay and Raam). Despite the creatures' dangerous reputation, a chance encounter with silk wyrms can be enticing. Organizations as disparate as merchant houses, templars, or the Veiled Alliance might recruit adventurers to investigate rumors of a silk wyrm nest. Capturing a silk wyrm could involve additional encounters to safeguard the creature and take a caravan back to civilization (consider the Guiding a Caravan skill challenge mentioned earlier).

In this encounter, a silk wyrm has recently hatched several young. To better protect its brood, the creature has chosen an area with dangerous cacti.

Adjusting the Challenge: Although brambleweed (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 134) does not have an experience point value, it adds to the challenge, making the encounter level closer to 4. For a true level 3 encounter, remove the brambleweed. To increase the threat from the monsters, add more hatchlings or level them up using the D&D Monster Builder.

Encounter Area: Shrubs and cacti are scattered throughout an area of hard-packed earth. Three 10-by-10-foot areas of nest (lightly obscured) are roughly 15 feet apart from one another, forming a triangle. The central area is dominated by brambleweed. Two nests hold two hatchlings each; the nest farthest from the party's point of approach has a hatchling and an adult.

Light: Depending on when the characters investigate the nest, the light can range from pitch black, to dim light under the twin moons, to the bright light of the harsh sun.

Monsters: 1 silk wyrm adult, 5 silk wyrm hatchlings (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, pages 84–85).

When the party approaches the area, read:
Fine strands of silk run through the cacti and shrubs in this area, gathering into three structures roughly ten feet in circumference. These structures are arranged in a triangular fashion around a central area filled with low, thorny brush.

Nature DC 21: A character identifies the silk wyrm nests and the dangerous brambleweed.

Perception DC 21: A character notices the monsters hiding in the nests.

The encounter begins when a character approaches within 2 squares of a nest. If unnoticed, the creatures in that nest gain a surprise round, but the rest act on their initiative count.

Brambleweed: Brambleweed squares are difficult terrain. A creature that starts its turn in a brambleweed square takes 5 damage. A creature that ends its turn in a brambleweed square is restrained until the start of its next turn.

Tactics: The silk wyrm adult positions itself so it can use *mesmerizing dread* to push foes into the brambleweed. It uses *shadow form* or *serpent strike* to retreat as necessary, including into the silk, from where it can attack bloodied creatures without penalty.

Silk wyrm hatchlings prefer bloodied targets but otherwise attack the closest creature.

If seriously threatened, the wyrms flee, only to track down the characters when they next stop to rest.

Treasure: The nests can be salvaged, providing enough silk for a skilled artisan to produce clothing for six individuals. Salvaging the silk could be part of a quest leading to enchanting the clothing. A captured silk wyrm adult carries greater value and can be the source of other quests to barter or sell the creature.

Sandy Wastes

Classic desert terrain, the sandy wastes of Athas capture the complete degradation of the land into waves of sand dunes that extend as far as the eye can see.

Features

Dunes are formed as the wind strikes the sand in different ways. Travel is often slow due to the soft and shifting ground. Adventurers must stay sharp since the dunes limit visibility and are perfect for ambushes.

Various types of sand dunes help avoid monotony while providing an iconic desert experience.

- Mekillot sand dunes are mounds up to 750 feet high, similar in shape to the Athasian beast of burden for which they are named. Strong winds pile the sand, then smooth away any peaks.
- Wave dunes are long ridges of sand, 50 to 100 feet tall, formed when winds from two directions push the sand up into long peaks. Traveling over this terrain can involve navigating a maze formed by the dunes or cresting the sharp ridges.
- Crescent dunes form when winds push sand over a hard surface, creating a series of curved dunes. Meandering between these dunes is monotonous.
- Star dunes are shaped by wind from many directions, forming into tall peaks with long radial arms. Typically long-lasting, star dunes can serve as landmarks for easier orientation.

Sun exposure is a constant threat among the dunes, since little shelter is available. The heat of the day and the cold of night are also dangers. Dying of thirst is always a possibility; water seldom pools in the sand, and the rare oasis is usually fiercely guarded.

Encounters can change due to wind, which can shift terrain randomly, push or blind creatures, and provide concealment. Sandstorms are an excellent component of a skill challenge and can throw characters off course, deplete survival days, or provide escape from dangerous foes during combat.

Shifting winds also reveal the past when ancient ruins are momentarily uncovered. An encounter in which the characters must race to explore a ruin before it is swallowed up again can be compelling, especially if it reveals tantalizing glimpses of the true history of Athas. Ruins also provide contrast to the arid terrain and highlight environmental change.

Plants struggle against the dunes, but occasional clumps of dry grasses, small bushes, and fields of small cacti grow in the slacks among the dunes. Traders warn against allowing mounts to graze on plants that have purple leaves, although kanks are fine on such fodder.

Creatures

Merchants, raiders, and slave tribes all have reason to travel the sandy wastes of Athas. Many of the trade roads between city-states cross such terrain. The sifting sands are also perfect for crawling and burrowing creatures such as anakores, baazrags, earth drakes, gaj, megapedes, nightmare beasts, Athasian ant lions, snakes, and burrowing spiders.

Ruins Ambush

Encounter Level 7 **1,700 XP**

In a strong wind, the shifting sands momentarily reveal a tower from which extends a long stone causeway raised on stone pillars. Fossilized rib cages (the remains of boats) surround the location. While the characters are inspecting the long, dry pier, anakores below the sand strike with surprise. A devil dune adds a terrain element as the strong winds begin to cover the location once more.

Adjusting the Challenge: You can adjust the challenge of this encounter by varying the anakores' tactics. They could abandon the fight if badly wounded to provide respite for the party, or additional anakores could arrive if the fight is too easy for the player characters. The devil dune allows further adjustment, since it could be present only on some rounds when the wind picks up. Terrain such as ash fields and black sand (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 134) can be added or substituted to portray a defiled area.

For added tension, the characters might need to find an important item, and due to the shifting sands, they have only a few rounds to locate it.

Encounter Area: Plenty of soft sand surrounds the piers. The Dungeon Tiles: Desert of Athas set can be used for this purpose. The image on pages 122–123 of the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog* can help players visualize the encounter.

Light: Anakores avoid direct sunlight, so this encounter should take place at dusk, dawn, or under the dim light of the two moons.

Monsters: 3 anakore hunters, 1 anakore render, 1 anakore dune king (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, pages 12–13).

Hazard: 1 devil dune (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 140).

When the party approaches the area, read:
A tower juts up from the sand. A long stone causeway raised on stone pillars extends outward from it. Fossilized rib cages surround the structure. The wind howls around the pillars, blowing and piling the surrounding sand.

Passive Perception DC 23: A character notices movement in the sand, and the party is not surprised.

Anakores surround the characters, striking at a moment when the party stands on bare sand. The devil dune strikes on the second round.

Devil Dune: The wind is causing the sand to bury this area once again. All creatures are potential targets. The anakores are accustomed to the shifting sands and can burrow away. They gain a +2 bonus to all defenses and to saving throws against the devil dune.

Sand Dunes: The sand is difficult terrain for a creature ascending a dune.

Wind: Occasionally, the wind renders some parts of the encounter area lightly obscured.

Tactics: All anakores use tremorsense and burrowing as appropriate. The anakore hunters use *bite* on one target until they can use *drag under*. The render charges with *claw* to highlight the burrowing ability, but it uses *blood frenzy* and *rending bite* against a bloodied target. The dune king uses *sand eruption* to dramatic effect and can use *sand slide* to burrow under the ground if hurt, possibly charging out of the sand the following round.

Treasure: The ruins could hold ancient artifacts, lore, or a magic item. Anakore hide can be used to make *anakore armor* (see "Monster Hunters of Athas" in *Dragon* 391).

Rocky Badlands

Twisting canyons of crumbling rock, badlands are an exciting terrain for exploration and combat.

Features

Colorful striations, walls and pillars hundreds to thousands of feet high, fantastic bridges worn by the wind, and meandering mazes that change elevation drastically create a visually stunning scene. Images of the Grand Canyon or other real-world arid badlands can serve as inspiration for encounter settings.

The varied terrain works well for exploration and skill challenges to traverse the terrain, hunt for prized creatures, search for ritual components, find a secretive ally, race against foes in chariots, or locate an ancient ruin. Combat encounters can happen in narrow ravines, on rock bridges, while mounted along perilous switchbacks, or in a box canyon filled with cacti. The high elevations are particularly dangerous at night, when temperatures plummet below freezing. Characters who need a warm shelter might be forced to find caves, abandoned or otherwise.

The shade and oases formed from water trickling down from mountains can allow brambles and cacti to form dense thickets. Stunted trees bearing leaves of silver, gold, and purple hues abound. Silverknife, a form of brush with serrated silver-white leaves, is common along badland walls. Travelers should make note of wanderer's staff—round bushes of yellow and gray featuring tall stems. The stems are fine for reptilian mounts but deadly to a kank. Dagger plants are another hazard; their serrated leaves are as sharp as shards of obsidian, and the ends bear long needles containing a paralyzing poison.

Creatures

A wide variety of Athasian creatures live in rocky badlands, notably aarakocras and gith, but also baazrags, beetles, belgoi, braxats, brohgs, cilopses, gaj, hejkins, id fiends, insects (giant and swarms), rocs, silk wyrms, spiders, and tembos.

Slave tribes and raiders also make homes in hidden ravines. Hermits live in badlands caves, and some have ancient knowledge or serve as psionic teachers. Others delve into forbidden lore or are near madness, making them formidable adversaries.

Belgoi Calling

Encounter Level 9 **2,000 XP**

Belgoi, having tracked and watched the characters during the day, wait until an inquisitive and weak-willed character is on watch. They use their bells to call to the character, hoping to strike quickly before the others can react.

Adjusting the Challenge: A belgoi hunter could be substituted for the braxat for a slightly easier fight. For a greater challenge, add more belgoi, especially cravens.

Encounter Area: This encounter takes place at night when characters are camped in a labyrinthine canyon that has several approach points.

Light: Dim, pale-green light from the moon Ral.

Monsters: 4 belgoi cravens, 2 belgoi stalkers, 1 belgoi caller (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, pages 16–17), and 1 braxat juvenile (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 18).

When the encounter starts, read:
A gentle ringing breaks the monotony of the night's watch. The ringing repeats, this time farther away. It might soon be too distant to follow if you fail to act now.

Tactics: The belgoi wait just out of sight, taking cover behind boulders or in a connecting canyon. They hope to ambush the characters on watch, gaining a full round before the others awaken. If the character on watch instead begins to wake the rest of the party, the belgoi stalkers attack with *enticing ring*, hoping to gain a surprise round before the others respond.

After *enticing ring* has dazed an opponent, stalkers work together to use *claw* on a single target. The belgoi cravens attack, shift back, and use *compelling ring* to move a character next to the braxat or caller. The belgoi caller uses *distant ringing* on a group of characters, centering the burst on the braxat's square if possible. It otherwise uses *command of the bell* to draw foes to the braxat. The braxat uses *thrash* as often as possible.

Development: The braxat is psionically controlled. You can allow the characters to realize this fact by making a successful DC 17 Insight check. Once the braxat is bloodied, the compulsion controlling the creature weakens, and a successful DC 25 Intimidate check can turn it against its controllers.

Because belgoi are cowards, characters can use intimidation or bribery to convince their foes to withdraw. Doing so is harder if the belgoi believe they are winning the battle.

Treasure: Braxat shells can be sold or salvaged for armor. Belgoi bells are sometimes made of valuable materials.

Stony Barrens

Stony barrens are the most common terrain on Athas. The ground consists of sheets of sandstone, and over the ages, the surface has been broken into rocks ranging in size from pebbles to boulders. The common Athasian saying "For every rock a dozen thorns" reflects the multitude of cacti and thorny bushes that thrive in stony barrens.

In some areas, particularly near mountains, the vertical shelves of sandstone have broken and tumbled into fields of large boulders. These fields are far harsher for travelers, offering little water or food.

Features

The texture, size, color, and vertical nature of the boulders and terrain can inspire rich descriptions. In stony barrens, the bedrock can be worn into pits where sand or silt collects from adjoining terrain. Crescent dunes can form, blown from neighboring sandy wastes. Stone pillars, mesas, and buttes add diversity. Stones can be difficult terrain, require climbing or encourage athletic leaps, or divide a battlefield into separate sections.

Scattered stones can reduce overland speed to half the usual in some areas and disrupt caravans and exploration. Kanks and mekillots can usually traverse stony barrens without impediment, but vehicle wheels require constant maintenance.

Cacti in stony barrens come in many shapes and sizes. Some might contain water or be highly nutritious, such as the squat thorny grall, which grows bulbous fruit eaten raw or fermented to make "cactus blue" ale. Others have mobile needles that dig into a creature's flesh until they reach vital organs. Some cactus flesh is poisonous, contains parasites, or fires needles on tethers to drag prey closer to feeding thorns. Motile, semisentient cacti such as the zombie cactus (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 22) and the cacti described in "Hazards of Dark Sun" (*Dragon* 364) can be the basis for combat encounters or hazardous exploration.

Vegetation is far rarer in boulder fields, where water is found only in small, stagnant pools and can be unfit for drinking. Boulders are treacherous for mounts, since the rocks can catch their legs or shift under a creature's weight.

Travelers might need to cross boulder fields to reach the Ringing Mountains or other ranges. Praying to earth spirits before such a journey is a common folk practice.

Creatures

Herds of wild animals feed on the cacti and brush in stony barrens, in turn attracting predators of all sizes, from hordes of tiny z'tals (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 137) to enormous drakes. Creatures that hunt in rocky badlands often find refuge or set up ambushes among the rocks. Mobile attackers, such as dune reapers and thri-kreen, can spring in and out of cover.

Reaper Hunt

Encounter Level 13 4,300 XP

A pack of dune reapers hunts the characters, finally mounting an ambush in an area of stony barrens. Tall rocks showcase the creatures' leaping ability and make the encounter more dynamic.

Adjusting the Challenge: The dune reapers' multiple attacks and terrain advantages make this combat highly challenging. To change the challenge level, remove obsidian pebbles or add psychic reservoirs. For a particularly vicious combat, add sunwarped theme powers (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 132) to the dune reapers.

Encounter Area: The battle takes place in an area dotted with flat-topped rocks and boulders (4 or fewer squares apart) upon which the dune reapers can leap.

Light: Bright light under the crimson sun.

Monsters: 3 dune reaper drones, 1 dune reaper shriek, 1 dune reaper warrior (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, pages 38–39).

When the encounter starts, read:

The multitude of dark rocks scattered in this area make travel rough. Some of the rocks contain sharp shards of volcanic glass. A sweet smell wafts through the area.

Nature DC 20: A character identifies the sweet odor and knows that dune reapers are nearby.

Passive Perception DC 29: A character notices the dune reapers and avoids being surprised.

If they have not been detected, the dune reapers attack with surprise.

Boulders: These rocks are 5 to 15 feet high. The boulders are blocking terrain that can be climbed (DC 15 Athletics check).

Obsidian Pebbles: In a few areas, the pebbles underfoot are sharp and slippery. A creature that enters a square containing the pebbles must succeed on a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone and take 10 damage per tier from the obsidian fragments.

Psychic Reservoirs: A few boulder tops are crystalline psychic reservoirs. With a minor action, a creature adjacent to or in the same square as a reservoir can extract the energy from it, causing it to crumble to dust. If the creature uses power points, it gains 1 power point that lasts until the end of the encounter or until expended. If the creature does not use power points, it adds 10 extra psychic damage to its next damage roll.

Tactics: The dune reaper drones harry soft or bloodied targets, leaping to evade effective melee attackers. The dune reaper shriek alternates between *shrieking reap* and *shrieking warp*, moving targets onto obsidian pebbles when possible. The dune reaper warrior positions itself centrally so as to benefit the other pack members.

Treasure: A dune reaper's shell can be salvaged for armor and is coveted by merchants and gladiators. The creature's bladelike forelegs can be turned into weapons or used to repair broken weapons.

Salt Flats

Salt flats are expanses of flat, salt-encrusted ground. Few creatures threaten travelers here due to the lack of vegetation and water, and it is easy for vehicles to move across the featureless terrain quickly. Travelers must take care not to run low on supplies. The Great Ivory Plain is the largest salt flat in the Tablelands, occupying a wide band southeast of the city-states of Gulg and Nibenay.

Features

The crunch underfoot, the sun's rays reflecting off the shining white plains, and the taste of salt in the air can stimulate the senses of characters and the imaginations of players. Ease of travel can be attractive, especially when time is of the essence.

However, travel can become monotonous unless a trip is punctuated periodically with ruins, an oasis, and features such as glimmering mirages or lightning pillars (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 135). Sun-warped terrain and creatures can work well here due to the terrain's exposure to the sun. Travelers wear cloth headgear when strong winds blow, shielding their eyes from salt. When battle erupts, salt adds insult to injury—see the salt flats terrain and salt pile terrain power (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 136).

Water is present in salt marshes or brackish oases, and it is usually undrinkable. You could allow hard Endurance checks to gain benefit from the water, with a failure by 5 or more resulting in sun sickness (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 199). Dense gatherings of grass, brush, and tall reeds usually surround a salt marsh or an oasis, but these plants can also hide dangers. In addition, a salt marsh can crust over, dropping the unwary into waist-high water just as a creature attacks.

Creatures

The rarity of monsters in salt flats can make this terrain an ideal place to meet merchant house members, dune traders, or other travelers, bringing roleplaying to the forefront. If traders abscond with the characters' supplies, a survival trek through the salt flats could be very challenging.

Of course, creatures do pass through the terrain occasionally. Flying creatures work well, as do insects and reptiles. Large elite or solo monsters that traverse the land can make formidable opponents. Cilopses, earth drakes, gaj, id fiends, megapedes, and scorpions are among the few creatures that make homes here. Undead, such as salt zombies, are an excellent choice to underscore the lack of life in a salt flat. You might also consider reworking the salt golem as an elemental, rather than animate, threat in this terrain.

Water's Price

Encounter Level 15 6,400 XP

The characters spot a small oasis, but all is not as it seems. A false oasis hides the real one and might drown anyone who draws too near. A mated pair of megapedes lurks beneath the salt crust when the characters arrive.

Adjusting the Challenge: Salt piles can be added to reduce the challenge. The megapedes are not clever enough to make use of such terrain, so it can work in the party's favor.

Encounter Area: The encounter takes place on a featureless salt flat. Initially, only the 6-by-6-square false oasis is visible.

Light: Bright light.

Monsters: 2 megapedes (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 74).

Hazard: 1 false oasis (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 140).

When the party approaches the area, read:
A low line of reeds and grasses breaks the plain of salt. The plants surround an oasis. Unlike in the typical salt marsh, the water looks clear, suggesting that it is potable. However, a corpse face-down in the reeds might suggest otherwise. Upon the person's back is a rucksack that has several ceramic vials strapped to it.

Passive Perception DC 22: A character notices the rumbling and movement of salt as a megapede begins to attack, so the creature does not gain combat advantage on its first turn.

The encounter occurs either when a megapede attacks or the characters trigger the false oasis.

Tactics: The first megapede attacks on its initiative count on the second round, attacking as many targets as possible and using minor actions to focus on wounded opponents. On a separate initiative count, the second megapede attacks on the third round. Each megapede uses *psionic detonation* to move characters closer to the false oasis, hoping the desert creepers hidden within will hinder the prey.

When the false oasis attacks, it ignores the megapedes in favor of smaller morsels. The megapedes ignore the false oasis.

Treasure: The corpse is that of a preserver alchemist. His vials contain consumable items, and he might be carrying a magic item.

The real oasis contains slightly salty but drinkable water in a salt-dusted stone depression.

Mudflats

Pools of water are rare on Athas, and few oases are permanent. When water trickles near the surface, it sometimes moistens the surrounding dirt or silt, creating a mudflat. The mud can form a hard, dry layer during the day or when the flow of water lessens.

Features

A mudflat's hard crust can be treacherous, breaking without warning to become difficult terrain or a grasping bog (*Dungeon Master's Guide® 2*, page 60). The crust might conceal the presence of other terrain, adding an exploration aspect to an encounter.

The size of actual pools in a mudflat can be altered to create a specific story effect. The water might be bound in mud, requiring some effort to extract. Tiny pools can work well in an encounter in which there is competition to drink the water first. A roleplaying encounter can become tense if the water is insufficient for everyone to have a share. A larger pool can be an interesting oasis or highlight a larger threat.

Travelers can spot a mudflat from afar due to a concentration of vegetation. The moisture supports fast-growing, thin-stemmed brush and trees, including some with tall trunks and a wide, dome-shaped top of large fronds. Ferns, razor-sharp grasses, and broad-leafed plants create cover and add diversity to an encounter's terrain. Grasping plants can be a threat, especially if the plants are in pools of wet mud and can drag creatures into or under the muck.

Creatures

Because mudflats are small and exist within other terrain types, a wide variety of creatures are here. Chathrangs seek out mudflats, hiding among tall reeds. A snakelike reptile called a kluzd (use crushgrip constrictor statistics; *Monster Vault*, page 300) likes to lurk under mudflat crust, striking as a target walks over it. The kluzd drags its prey under the mud, exposing the quarry to risk of suffocation (*Rules Compendium*, page 180).

Drake Scale

Encounter Level 18 10,000 XP

An organization hires the characters to obtain a scale of a water drake for use as a rare ritual component. They need not kill the beast. Although tracking such a rare creature requires legwork, in this encounter, the heroes find the water drake and are forced to make several decisions.

Adjusting the Challenge: You can adjust the challenge level by having a thri-kreen druid become an ally or a foe. The terrain is simple to highlight the creature, but fantastic terrain such as grab grass (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 68) or brambleweed can enhance the threat level of the encounter. Mud sinks (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 136), which can work for or against the characters, can also be added.

Encounter Area: The 4-by-4-square pool sits in the center of a 12-by-12-square area of mudflats. Sandy wastes, rocky badlands, stony barrens, or other terrain can lie beyond the mudflats; sand dunes that are difficult to climb work well to keep all characters within striking distance and affected by zone powers. Shrubs and grasses occupy several squares in the mudflats and pool.

Light: Bright light, shortly after dawn.

Monsters: Water drake (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 34).

Other Creatures: 1 thri-kreen mauler (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 97), 1 thri-kreen desert talker (*Monster Manual® 3*, page 193).

When the party approaches the area, read:
The crimson sun chars the early morning sky with deep bands of purple and red. Among the dry wastes, you find an

area of mudflats. Cracked mud rings a large pool of cloudy water. Small green reeds and thorny bushes with waxy stems surround the pool.

Passive Perception DC 32: A character within 4 squares of the pool spots the water drake hiding at the muddy bottom.

Mud: Patches of thick mud are difficult terrain.

Pool: The pool is 10 feet deep in the middle, but it quickly becomes shallow and difficult terrain for creatures that lack a swim speed.

Tactics: The water drake is patient, erupting from the water when at least two characters are within striking distance. The creature gains surprise if nobody spotted it. The drake also emerges to fight if attacked.

The water drake prefers to fight within the pool, having an advantage against nonaquatic creatures. It uses *psionic clone* to threaten characters who do not approach the pool. It uses *drake's fury* to maintain strong pressure on melee combatants, and it uses its *orb of elemental water* powers to set up zones that harry rear-rank characters by forcing them to choose between remaining in the zone and being near the drake or its psionic clone.

Development: The drake must be bloodied for a scale to be dislodged. A character who can reach the drake can dislodge a scale as a standard action.

Thri-Kreen Observers: The area is also home to a thri-kreen druid named Tok'sa and her guardian, Hak'ka. They appear on the second round of combat atop one of the dunes surrounding the mudflat (6 squares away from the center). The thri-kreen appear on the opposite side, such that the drake is between them and the party. They study the characters from this distance, trying to understand their actions. Both thri-kreen remain passive observers until the drake becomes bloodied, at which point they grow agitated if the adventurers continue to attack the creature.

During the battle with the water drake, thri-kreen player characters or those who have a related background could make Insight checks to read the druid's reactions. Roleplaying or Diplomacy checks could encourage Tok'sa to start a conversation with a thri-kreen character.

If the characters stop fighting the water drake, Tok'sa calms the beast and engages the party in conversation. She asks the heroes why they need a scale, and she then permits them to take one. She also shares the story of the mudflat.

Lore: Tok'sa and Hak'ka have long tended this mudflat, protecting it from the encroaching sand. Their efforts are no longer sufficient, and they fear the mudflat will be gone within a few months. Worse, they raised the water drake since it was a juvenile and have no other home for it. Although the drake is formidable, it is not likely to survive a trip through the wastes to search for a new watery residence. The characters could undertake a side quest to assist the druids in finding a new home for the drake. Another side quest could involve transporting the creature (especially if a noble or merchant aims to steal the drake for his or her own purposes).

Development: The thri-kreen could join the battle, especially if the characters attempt to kill the drake. Hak'ka is a thri-kreen mauler, and Tok'sa is a thri-kreen desert talker. To serve as threats, both should be leveled up to level 15 or higher. The adventurers could end the hostilities through roleplaying, but in any case, the thri-kreen are unwilling to die here. They retreat if the battle turns against them but might harry the party in the wilderness.

Treasure: To succeed in their mission, the characters must obtain a single drake scale. The reward for retrieving this prize should be significant. Killing the drake provides enough scales to create three sets of magic masterwork armor that is equivalent to wyrm-scale armor. The teeth and claws can be made into masterwork weapons, and the bones can function as raw materials for magic or superior implements.

Dust Sinks

Perhaps no terrain on Athas offers greater contrast than the Sea of Silt. What on other worlds would be a great body of water is instead a basin filled with choking dust. The silt obscures vision and bears no weight, making travel a tremendous challenge beyond the known shallow pathways.

Dust sinks are smaller areas of silt that bring the same hazards to other Athasian terrain. They underscore the devastated environment while presenting interesting challenges.

Features

Dust sinks are common near the Sea of Silt, where wind-blown dust collects in low areas. They can also be areas that once held water but were defiled in ages past. Heroic tier characters can be introduced to the perils of dust sinks through small pits of silt or a moat of silt that surrounds a location they must reach. In many areas of Athas, such as those near Altaruk, narrow estuaries of silt intrude into adjoining terrain.

The Sea of Silt is an excellent location for characters of upper heroic through epic levels. Its depth can vary suddenly, and few safe trails are known. Skill challenges might involve protecting supplies from silt storms, charting a safe course, finding safe islands of refuge, and repairing a silt vessel.

Silt can be flat or rest in wavelike drifts. When the wind is strong, the silt can rise up to obscure vision. Visibility can vary during an encounter as the wind changes (perhaps randomly) each round.

Dust can be a hazard, forcing characters to hold their breath. Characters covered in silt might find that some of their survival days become depleted, making them more susceptible to sun sickness.

Visually, characters are covered in gray-white powder and look like ghosts.

Travel across silt requires magic or special vehicles such as silt schooners, and travel is necessary to explore distant islands. These islands are the sole sources of vegetation and water in the Sea of Silt, and adventurers can explore, gather supplies, or even be shipwrecked on an island. Some isles also hold secrets of Athas's past.

Crossing the sea by riding in a silt vessel or walking a narrow path can lead to exciting encounters, especially with foes that can use forced movement to maneuver the characters into deeper silt.

Creatures

Giants are iconic inhabitants of the Sea of Silt, dwelling on most of the islands. Other inhabitants include anakores, brohgs, cloud rays, floating mantles, oasis beasts, silt elementals, silt horrors, silt runners, and silt sharks. Islands hold a greater variety of creatures. Flying beasts skim the surface of the sea, and on rare occasions, travelers might come across traders or raiders in silt vehicles.

Dust to Dust

Encounter Level 14 5,500 XP

The characters are traversing the Sea of Silt.

Adjusting the Challenge: To decrease the challenge, ignore the wind and make it easier to avoid silt drop-offs. To increase the challenge, give the characters an additional goal, such as maintaining control of the silt skimmer, to make it harder for them to focus on their foes.

Encounter Area: A silt skimmer (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, page 124) surrounded by silt of varying and sometimes dangerous depths.

Light: Bright light in early morning.

Monsters: 2 floating mantles, 2 floating mantle bluestings, 5 floating mantle polyps (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, pages 46–47).

When the encounter starts, read:

You move slowly through the treacherous silt. Small rocky pillars rise out of the dust. Gusts of wind blow silt into the air and limit visibility.

Passive Perception DC 22: The monsters approach under the cover of obscuring silt from a gust of wind. Success prevents the monsters from gaining a surprise round.

Silt: At best, silt is difficult terrain. Shallow silt can have deep spots (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 137). As the silt deepens near the safe section of the trail, it becomes a silt-filled pit 10 to 40 feet deep, creating a falling hazard. The silt doesn't protect a creature from falling damage. A creature submerged in silt has no line of sight to anything, and no one has line of sight to the submerged creature. Such a creature cannot breathe. At the end of its turn, a creature that needs to breathe but is submerged in silt takes 5 damage from choking.

The rocky walls that line the deeper drop-offs are relatively easy to climb (Athletics DC 15).

Wind: Each round, roll a d4. On a 1, wind blows silt into the air, lightly obscuring the area until the start of the next round.

Tactics: Floating mantles use *jet* to move into flanking positions to employ life leech. Bluestings use *flinging nettles*. The polyps swarm creatures, providing flanking for the other mantles.

About the Author

Teos Abadia is an administrator, developer, and author for the Ashes of Athas organized play campaign, set in the Dark Sun campaign setting. He is a frequent contributor to a variety of organized play campaigns and more devoted to Athas than most druids. You can follow his musings on his community blog and on Twitter (@Alphastream).

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